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BY

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I

IT was a late August evening. The monsoon was almost at the end of its career. There were infrequent showers, followed by that freshness and glory that always follow tropical rains. The air was clear and still. There was little of it in the congested native quarter, and still less filtered through the lattice of Maki's little window. A square yard of sky, and that infringed upon by the lattice bars, was all the world that Maki knew, unless she stood a-tiptoe on a stool, when she could see below, down the five stories of ugly brick and mortar on to an unedifying gully, which for her held a wealth of charm and interest in its varying panorama of humanity. At intervals passed a bullock cart, a broken-down hackney cab, dawdling forms of men and women, swinging lax arms through

laziness and day dreaming. At the corner of the street sat an old woman selling *pan*,¹ fulfilling thus the duties of public house and tobacconist for the average Indian. From a shed below—Maki could not see its occupant—issued soft pleading strains on a reed pipe, played with pathos and feeling. And all this for Maki was Calcutta. She saw nothing more. From above the surrounding house-tops came all the din of the main Indian thoroughfare, the clang-clang of the tram-cars in Harrison Road, the screech of the taxi-driver's horn or hooter, the grating crash of gears being changed, the yells of the cab-men, the wails of beggars, the quarrels of husbands and wives, for domestic broils are always brought out into the public thoroughfares.

Maki's father was a man of great wealth. Like all Indians, he concealed this by dressing unpretentiously. Indians can rarely be shabby; they only wear one garment, and that is merely drapery. They are either clean or dirty; all except the meanest strive to keep clean. But, whereas some wealthy Indians aspire to silks and satins and be-

¹ Betel-nut, a substance that Indians chew incessantly.

coming headgear, Toton Babu was quite content not to be looked up to as a Rajah. He kept no carriage, used the tram that his daughter could just hear from her window, and humbled himself before everybody as a poor man. Riches bring power. That he knew. But riches also bring envy. He feared being envied. Toton Babu was superstitious. Besides, there was a wave of hooliganism in Burra Bazaar, and wealthy men were every night made victims of burglaries and dacoities. But if Toton Babu thought he could deceive his neighbours by poor living he was mistaken. People contrive to find out a great many things about each other, particularly in native India, where gossip plays a far bigger part in daily life than it does elsewhere. Everybody knew Toton Babu was a rich man, and strange stories were whispered about his wealth and his miserliness..

Maki was her father's only child. Her mother was dead, and she was brought up by an aged ayah, toothless and ugly, but the soul of generosity, who worshipped the girl and spared herself no pains to satisfy every whim of the child's fancy. There were no

other females in the house. Toton's brothers and sisters, and their families, did not live with him—as is commonly done in the joint family system followed by Indians. They had their own home, the ancestral home in the *muffasil*.¹ They lived idly on the wealth that had been left them. But Toton was more aspiring. As a middleman in jute, Bengal's staple product, he had in the space of a few years made more money than could be told in one breath. Maki was indulged. She had silk *saris* and all the scents that Coolootollah could supply. She often bathed in rose-water. But all that was in the harem. Nobody knew what happened in the harem except the old ayah, and as she was always going to the outer world she doubtless gossiped. His neighbours, as a result, respected Toton Babu. His house, by some good fortune, was not touched by the burglars. Only the Europeans were off-hand in their treatment of him. He appeared to be no different from any other caller who came round as jute-broker. There was nothing in his dress or manner to warrant that they should stand up when he entered

¹ Country.

and offer him a chair. They let him wait while they scribbled or glanced through price lists for a new waterproof. They told him to "go to the devil" when they were busy. He did not mind; so long as he made his money. What he meant to do with the wealth he was amassing he was possibly not himself certain. One never is certain of such things, and still less are Indians who have hoarded millions which are never spent, never invested, and scarcely ever even enjoyed. Maki was his only heir. She was fifteen and still unmarried. An old maid almost according to Indian standards, but it was her parent's affection that kept her with him till so late in life. She was betrothed though; and as a concession Toton had consented that the following year her boy husband could come and claim her.

Maki had never seen her betrothed. Indian girls never do. Marriages are made-up affairs, the concern of the parents more than of the parties involved. A parent decides almost at the time of the child's birth, and girl babies and boy babies are tied together before they are old enough to toddle. There never is any romance. The girl is expected

to worship the little more than child that a certain amount of blowing of conch shells and trumpeting assigns to her as husband. He works up a passion of sorts towards her, until he tires, and, like the men of most nationalities, turns after variety and spends his nights in the perfumed underworld that fills so large a space in native Calcutta. The girl frets awhile and is then resigned, looking upon it as the decree of Heaven that allots to man the right to walk about the world, to meet and talk with other fellow creatures, and keeps the woman locked behind doors, a trifle worse than a pet dog—perhaps a little more petted. When the harem is full of women, mother and aunts, and older married sisters, the newer bride has the opportunity of observing the resignation of her elders. So she never frets. She takes her love and romance as it comes to her. There are the children to bring up, the window to peep through. There is the woman servant who is constantly going to and fro between the harem and the outer world, and she is the evening paper of a great number of editions for the zenana.

Maki stretched her arms wearily down-

wards behind her. The tail ends of strands of loose black hair glided over her wrists and joined the others down her back as the arms rose to each side and above her. Maki was tired through having done nothing. Her father's wealth, though he stinted himself, gave her everything that an Indian girl could desire. It gave her, though, no education. That was not the perquisite of the Indian child—certainly not of the girl. Perhaps it even gave her no happiness. She could not judge. There was nothing she could compare her own position to. She met no other girls that she could say, "Ah, I have this thing that this one or that one has not." She did not fret. She had no learning to make her discontented with her position.

From the gully below came up to her the smells of native Calcutta. These in books are looked upon as all the scents of Araby, and a good deal else besides, strong enough to make the poets sing. But let the poet of a European city, accustomed as he is to comparative cleanliness and order, and hateful as he feels towards insanitation, walk down an Indian street, and he will never

again write a panegyric. There is slush, and puddle and cow's dung. Shopkeepers wash their hands endlessly on the pavements and spit all around, while bullocks and goats and diseased beggars collide with men and with each other at almost every pace taken. There is colour in truth. The Indian woman—they are not all kept behind the *purdah*—is fond of gaudy shawls. She has saffron and green and bright blue, spread out in yards across her shoulders and round her head, while all the little tots dress in coloured silks, and the men sport glittering gold chains and jewelled rings, and turreted pugarees or dazzling hats like red haloes. Warped and woofed with these are the servile castes and the low tribes, filthy and stinking. From the roadside and the shops come the aroma of decay and curry and the smell of the unwashed perspiring in the summer weather. At gasps come amber and jasmine and the fragrant attar, savouring of wealth and festival.

Maki saw none of this. She smelt the curry and the various scents, and the clear air of a cleansed atmosphere, purified by the blessed rain. Motors screeched—though

Maki could not see them—trams clanged, and wooden shoes clattered behind her.

Aged and toothless and half blind Nishi, Maki's maid, entered with all the gossip of the bazaar to tell her young mistress. What else was there to do but gossip? When Maki had awakened and bathed and had been leisurely dressed and scented, there was just food and gossip, and after that more food and gossip. Her father came in at night-time. Sometimes he stayed an hour, sometimes only ten minutes. That depended as to whether there were friends downstairs or merely business callers. Friends could always be left to amuse themselves. Toton had his hookah brought up and smoked in a corner on a mattress, and was propped up with cushions against a wall that was stained by his bare oily back. Maki did most of the talking. Strange that she should have so much to say with having seen so little. She related some idle gossip Nishi had told her, how the sweetvendor's little child while asleep on the pavement was trampled to death by the holy bull that the vendor had fed so lavishly only a few days previously. The hookah gurgled . . . a wreath of

smoke . . . and then a gruff prolonged laugh. Toton knew Heaven would punish that man. He had put up all his prices on the excuse that sugar was more expensive.

This evening Nishi's gleanings of tidings contained one death and one new arrival. The old Mohammedan mendicant from Delhi that had for fifteen years haunted that gully, filling its high echoing walls with his rich voice and recurring refrain, full of tone and full of pathos, was dead.

"What will his little child do now?" asked Maki. A little boy used to lead this old man since he had succumbed to blindness.

"Oh, that boy. That was not his own child. That was the son of the man who makes umbrellas at the shop next to the corner." Nishi approached the window. 'You can see the edge of the thatch there. The one from which the washed rags are hanging. It was the umbrellamaker's son, and the blind man had to give him a share of his takings, by way of hire for the child. Oh! And you thought it was the old man's child.' The aged servant was amused at the mistake. Little things amused her.

Maki laughed as heartily.

"To think that I should have thought it was the beggar's child. How funny! I wonder has the beggar any children."

"Yes, yes. He has many children." Nishi was well informed. "But they are not children. They are grown men. The beggar was very old. His sons are in Delhi. One, I hear, has gone to Lucknow. He works in service with a European sahib, and gets good money. Yes, the poor man was very old. He could remember the Mutiny."

"And can you not remember the Mutiny too? Eh, Nishi?"

The old woman chuckled softly.

"I was in Calcutta at the time, not much happened here. I heard a little from my grandmother of the doings. I was very young myself, then."

"How old are you now, Nishi?"

"I can remember the time before train *gharis* and tram *gharis*. I must be sixty or seventy years old."

Indians of the uneducated classes, having no idea of dates, can never tell exactly how old they are.

Nishi had already told Maki all about trains and trams; so Maki asked no questions about these. She was more interested in the poor blind beggar.

"Then shall we not hear his voice to-night? How sad. I used to love to hear him sing

" ' O Allah, it is only thy will I follow.

O master, do with me just as thou pleasest. '

He won't sing to-night, then; will he? " Maki could hardly believe it.

"He will not sing to-night; nor to-morrow night; nor again the night after that. But he will sing again after that. Whenever his spirit longs for this earth, it will return, and he will go through the same streets with the same songs."

Maki sat nearer Nishi and touched her flabby arm.

"Nishi, I hope his spirit never longs for this earth again. I shall be so frightened if I hear his voice again."

"You silly child. What is there to be frightened about? "

"I don't know. Don't let us talk of it any more."

"Only just now you were sorry that you would not hear him to-night——"

"Nishi," almost yelled the wilful girl, "do not let us talk of him any more. I shall scream if you make me frightened."

"Just as you please, but you are a funny child. At your age too."

"What other news is there, Nishi?"

"No other news. The flute-player's son has just returned from his ship. He is a nice handsome man, and he plays the flute too."

The sound of the flute was almost always audible in Maki's room. The flute-player made his own flutes and tested them. And then he played them as an advertisement, to attract attention to himself and his craft. The flute had been playing all the time that Maki and Nishi had been talking. But the mention of the player's son and the fact that he played a flute too drew Maki's attention to the sound.

"I wonder if that is the son playing. I feel sure it is. It sounds to me to be different from what we have been used to

hearing. He does not play as well as his father. Nishi, go down and see if it is the father? ”

“ Do not bother me now, child. I am old and tired. What matters if it is son or father. ”

“ Quiet, quiet, Nishi. Let me hear him. He plays quite well. Listen. It is too good. It must be the father. Ah, no, no; it's the son. The father does not put in all those fanciful trills. His playing is quite straightforward. Nishi, won't you go and see? ”

With a grumble Nishi arose and tottered out of the room, scowling. Once behind the door she slipped into her mouth a roll of *pan*, and crawled slowly down the stairs. A flight down she looked towards the flute-player's little seat by the pavement, could distinguish nothing, and then returned slowly to tell Maki that it was the father, after all, that had been playing. .

“ Not the father, surely? ” said Maki. She had been weaving flowers into her hair in Nishi's absence, and was still before the mirror. “ Not the father, surely? You didn't go and see. Nishi. You were not

gone long enough. Go again, Nishi, and see properly this time."

"Chhhh," grumbled Nishi as she sat down. "I did see. I went right downstairs to the flute-maker and he gave me this *pan* that I am eating."

"Don't tell me lies, Nishi. Go again. Get up." Maki had moved from the mirror and was endeavouring to lift Nishi by the arms, saying, "Come, Nishi; be good, Nishi. Get up."

Nishi grumbled and got up and went downstairs to the front door. By that time she had forgotten what she had come down for, in such a dream had she wandered. She drifted towards the woman who sold *pan* at the street corner, and begged of her a piece of *sukha*.¹

"Kaloo, the *ghuri wallah's* wife has had her throat cut and Kaloo is missing," gossiped the *pan* seller.

"*Hai, hai*," lisped toothless Nishi. "And who has done all this?"

"How should I know? They say it was Kaloo. He has never been the same to his

¹ Tobacco.

wife since Kishore, the bad woman, came to live in this neighbourhood."

"And has Kishore gone too?"

"Why should she go? Kaloo wanted the jewels from his wife to give to Kishore. His wife, foolish woman, gave them not to him, so he cut her throat and took them. He is in hiding now because the police are on the search for him."

"So he got the jewels, but lost Kishore. Will he return, do you think?"

"How should I know? Was I his paramour that he should tell me? You ought to know more. Was not Kaloo attentive to you once?"

"To me! Shame upon you to say such a thing. And I old enough to be his mother. Attentive to you more likely. You know so much about him. Did I ask you? Did you not tell me without my asking?"

"I told you because I knew you were interested in him."

Nishi was very incensed by this time at these insinuations.

"Keep a civil tongue, woman, I tell you." And then raising her voice howled, "Listen to what this dog of a wretch, the

sweetheart of the murderer, Kaloo, has to say."

By this time a large crowd had gathered. The *pan* vendor put down beside her all the *pan* leaves that she had had on her hunched knees and stood up to meet her opponent. With arm extended to the right, and arm extended to the left, she explained to the onlookers in the vilest of language an entirely new version of the dispute. Old Nishi, meanwhile, was also talking. Her remarks were mostly taunts and gibes. Her winered arms were extended each in turn gauntly towards her screeching opponent.

"Come, come, mother." One or two onlookers took the old Nishi tenderly by the arm and tried to draw her away. But the *pan* vendor came nearer and nearer. The quarrel grew to enormous proportions. The crowd of listeners grew larger. Questions were asked as to the start of the dispute by newcomers, and explained by those who had been longer there and re-explained by each of the disputants. At length, both women exhausted, the quarrel faded to curses that died away in the moist evening air. The solitary gully lamp was lighted by the lamp-

lighter when the distraction of the row freed him to attend to his duties, and Nishi hobbled back to Toton Babu's old-fashioned mansion, muttering curses against Kaloo, his wife and family unto the third generation.

When Nishi reached Maki's room Toton was already there, reclining at ease in his usual corner, his back against the blackened wall, and pulling noisily at his hookah. Nishi entered.

"Well, Nishi?" asked Maki.

Nishi coughed thoughtfully. She had completely forgotten even the nature of her errand.

"Oh," she commenced, recollecting, "it was the father who was playing the flute after all. I told you it was not the son."

"What was the row, in the street?" asked Toton. "Do you know?"

Nishi cleared her throat and commenced. She did not know how to commence. It was obvious she could not say too much in the presence of Maki of things of so delicate a nature.

"Kaloo has murdered his wife," she started.

"Did he murder her now? In the street?" Maki asked, excited.

In native Calcutta, even children talk of murders and deaths as if it were no more than talking of food. And in fact murders and deaths are common enough, despite the British protection.

"But that was not the noise of a murder just now?" said Toton. "It sounded to me as if two women were fighting. Was one of them not that quarrelsome *pan* seller? That woman's loud lungs are never silent."

"It was, *jee*," said Nishi respectfully. "That *pan wali* called me some of the vilest things you can think of. I could not leave them unanswered."

"Oho!" said Toton teasingly. His day's work was done and his mind a blank. He seized at the least little thing to fill it and provide diversion for his hours of relaxation. The most commonplace affairs of other people are discussed threadbare in an Indian household. "So it was you who was squabbling. Truly you are as bad as the *pan* vendor."

Maki laughed.

"Tell us, Nishi, some of the things she called you."

"No, no. How could I? They were terrible."

"Were they about your indiscretions?" asked Toton, still teasing.

"She said I was a lover of Kaloo's. Imagine. And I old enough——"

Toton laughed till he coughed and had to stop smoking. Maki laughed too, though her understanding was somewhat clouded. To her romance and Nishi were things opposed. She laughed because she thought her father must have made a good joke.

"And weren't you his lover? You sly dog. Tell me." Toton was very playful. Maki enjoyed it immensely.

Nishi hung her head and said "No" shyly. Shyness in one so old and withered seemed so inconsistent.

A voice howled up from the central courtyard below and the sound drifted across the balcony into Maki's room. It said somebody had come to see Toton on business. Servants—men-servants—were not allowed near that part of the house assigned to the women. They had to yell out their mes-

sages from below. Toton told Nishi to yell back and ask what was the business.

Nishi walked out into the balcony and looked down into the darkness of the central courtyard. She called down the message given her.

"To buy some diamonds," came back from the darkness after the servant below had consulted the visitor.

"To buy some diamonds?" said Toton from within. "And what is the hour now?"

Nishi asked. It was called back to her that it was nearly half-past ten in the night.

"What hour is this to buy diamonds!" exclaimed Toton, continuing to puff at his hookah.

After some moments he arose, aided by Maki and Nishi, stretched for his stick that stood against the wall, and thudded down the ill-lighted stairs.

"What hour is this to buy diamonds!" he called aloud by way of greeting to his visitor, from the resounding cement of the last stairs. Toton, though a jute broker by day, sold precious stones in the evening. No hour is too late for visits or business with an Indian. But Toton rarely came down

again after retiring. To-night he was in a good mood. Generally business callers, after Toton had gone up, for the evening, were told, "There are no more diamonds to be sold. Toton Babu cannot see you."

II

MAKI'S conception of the world was very nebulous. She saw it solely through Nishi's eyes, and they were not wholly clear, nor were her statements always accurate. Maki had never been out of doors. She had been condemned to solitary confinement for the sin of being born a female. Had she been born an animal, she could not have fared worse. Even caged birds see more of life than zenanaed women. They certainly do not know much less. For Maki theatres were non-existent; so were cinemas. She had never even heard of them. They were not places that Nishi at her time of life would think of visiting. Maki had never seen a motor-car. The gully was too small to admit them. But Nishi had described it for her, told her about the strange *gharis* that could move without horses. Of course Maki would have liked to have seen this sort of thing, and the tram, and the ships that Nishi had seen from

the riverside. Maki could not read. There was nothing to divert her mind, but dressing, and eating and singing. Her father had taught her some anecdotal songs, that told of Bengali warriors and their deeds. She could remember enough to hum some childish jingles sung to her by her mother. Nishi was too old to convey to her any of the newer ditties. Stray phrases of songs Maki picked up from passers-by in the street. But that was rarely. There is no such thing as a regular musical output in native India, and musical comedy scores do not move the native town in the same way as a haunting waltz would European Calcutta. The truth is that native music is so rarely haunting. It is not even catchy. All the best lyrics are as old as the hills in the north. And there is actually no such thing as a minstrel serenading his lady-love. Maki knew all the beggar songs. These men came every day, and they sang for hours beneath, far, far beneath, her lattice, strumming an incongruous accompaniment on a queer one-stringed instrument. When the neighbours had a party—it was Maki's hour of happiness. The umbrella-makers were always

having evening sing-songs, to which the flute-maker brought his flute, and the *ghari wallah* from round the corner his heavy thudding tom-tom. They sang of the day when the world was young, and nothing prevailed but love. They wailed of the hardships that have succeeded and the comparative worthlessness of life. Often their songs were lewd. Then Nishi, who rarely was away for long from Maki, would distract her by telling her a story, or would tuck her into bed and adjure her to be good and go to sleep. The child understood not a word of the lewdness; but Nishi knew it all too well. As a child, she had played in the streets in her village, and the Indian street child is lewder in its language than the grown-ups.

Maki sang as she dressed and when she was not singing, and Nishi not gossiping, Nishi was telling her a story. Nishi was always telling Maki stories. Nishi had told her more tales than there were in *The Arabian Nights*, and Nishi had still a large store unexhausted.

Nishi's position entailed a variety of duties. In return she received a wage that

worked out to a very few shillings weekly. Nishi filled a big gap in Maki's life. Without Nishi her life would have been a blank, totally.

Maki was soon to be married. She knew nothing about love and romance. All Nishi told her was that she would have a young boy as a companion to play with. Maki thought that would indeed be jolly. She had never had anyone to play with. Nishi also told her she would have heaps and heaps of little babies; for it is an Indian wife's duty to bear children. "But why don't I have babies now?" Maki would ask, simply. But Nishi would only tell her not to be silly. Nishi never explained things. She did not know how to.

"And whom shall I marry?" Maki asked once when Nishi told her of the beautiful jewels that were being made for the occasion.

"Who?" exclaimed Nishi considerably taken aback. "Why the man you are engaged to, you silly."

"Do not be angry with me, Nishi. I do not understand these things."

"Then children should not ask stupid questions."

Maki had an idea that the man she was to marry had been assigned her by Heaven.

In the silence of her crude thoughts the flute from below wailed out a pathetic melody.

"Can my husband play the flute?" asked Maki simply.

"How should I know? I do not know him."

"Then it isn't by any chance the flute-player's son I'm going to marry?"

"*Hai, hai,*" said Nishi very much disgusted. "What queer ideas this child has! Why should you want to marry the flute-maker's son? Have you nothing higher to look to?"

"I don't know. I should like my husband to play the flute for me. I could then tell him to play to me whenever I wanted him to. The flute-player downstairs plays when *he* wants to. And sometimes I am in my bath and I miss all the good music. Last week for three days he was ill, and I heard not his playing."

"Heaven preserve us! How can a man play when he is ill. If your husband were

ill would you still want him to play to you, foolish one?"

"It is true, I wouldn't," said Maki, shaking her head sadly. "But I suppose I couldn't marry a flute-player's son, could I?"

"No, of course you couldn't. You have got a husband. From where do you get all these wicked ideas?"

"From nowhere, Nishi. I don't want to marry the flute-player's son. Only I thought it would be nice if I could if I wanted to."

"And why should it be nice if you could?"

Maki did not reply. She did not give the subject another thought. She had given voice to a whim of the moment. Already it was forgotten.

Maki next got Nishi to tell her all about the beautiful jewels that were being made for her marriage.

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It happened that before Maki was joined to her betrothed in marriage the aged Nishi was called unto her final rest, and Maki's

hours dragged like the ceaseless chains that she could see in the tea warehouse beyond drawing up the heavy cases. She did not realize till then how essential the old woman had been to her existence. It seemed to Maki that her own existence had ended. The days seemed to be so different. She did not appear to be living. Her dressing was uninteresting; her meals, hours of ghastly agony. There was no gossiping, no story telling to beguile the long evenings and the monotony of an Indian zenana.

Her father's visits were the only things that still lingered from the dead past. Maki had talked lightly of death once. She had never understood quite till now what death meant; what its effects were. She had never imagined how vastly it could alter the existence of even those that it had left behind.

Maki had all the hours of the day for thinking, with never a thought worth thinking. When the motors hooted she thought of the descriptions Nishi had given her of these wonderful inventions; when the trams clanged she wondered if they were running over people and killing them, since one had killed poor Nishi's sister's son, the lame boy

who had been assistant gate-keeper of a pilgrim rest-house. Nishi must be with this little lad now. Maki imagined that all dead people met in the next world. She wondered whether in the land the dead go to there are also trams and motors and flute-players. The flute suddenly seemed to ring out in her ears. She wondered whether if she died and if the flute-player's son died too, whether they would meet wherever it was they went to. She feared they would not. She was a girl and he a boy and they could never meet unless they married. That was the Indian custom decreed by Heaven; and was it not Heaven they went to when they quitted this existence? And Heaven had allotted her a different husband.

Below the window a couple of saffron clad fakirs sang out a rather lively ditty in a strange jargon. It was surprising to hear anything so lively from holy men. Maki got on to a low stool and pressed her face against the lattice. The fakirs were bearded, and painted with the holy signs—white and saffron on cheek and forehead. She did not like their singing. How different it was to the singing of the poor blind beggar the little

boy used to lead down the gully. How rich, how touching was his plaintive cry:

“O Allah, it is only thy will I follow.

O master, do with me just as thou pleasest.”

Nishi must be with that beggar now. How much nicer it must be to be dead. To be with Nishi and to hear that pleasant voiced mendicant nightly. But the little boy had not died. Would the blind man stroll the streets of the land where the dead went to without a little boy? Or would he find another? Perhaps he would not be blind! Perhaps he would not have need to be begging! As far as Maki remembered, Nishi used to tell her that after death life was all happiness. Maki wished she could die. Her mother was dead. She would like to meet her mother. She could not remember ever having seen her mother.

Maki cast her eyes upward towards the flecked sky with its slowly drifting white clouds, and the circling kites that screeched as they swept down behind the houses, darting down, she imagined, for little children in Harrison Road, as Nishi used to tell her.

She longed for Nishi and her mother and for death. She sighed and wished she could think of a way in which she could end life.

Another woman had been engaged by Toton in place of Nishi. But Maki did not feel the same way towards her. The woman did not seem to be as gentle, as obliging. She never told Maki any fairy stories, and Maki had not yet the courage to ask her to repeat the gossip of the big world outside. The woman was young, much younger than Nishi. Maki felt certain she could not understand things as Nishi did. How then could she be expected to interpret life?

Maki looked down again into the street below. The painted fakirs had finished singing and were holding out their gourd bowls for rice. A mud-stained bull nosed its way into the rubbish heaps on the roadside, and every other passer-by bowed his head before the animal, to worship its divinity. A barebacked youth, with a brass mug of water held behind him, crouched down and stepped under a yard of projecting matting, propped up by a single bamboo pole. It was from under that matting that the sound of the flute had always issued.

There was no playing now. In a moment or two the sounds from down there were sounds as of gargling, and, at intervals, a youthful head covered with curly black hair came out to spit out the water. A twig was next inserted into the mouth as a tooth-brush; and there was more spitting and gargling. Maki felt certain that must be the son of the flute-player. So at last she had seen him. She had; and she hadn't. She hadn't yet seen his features. He worked on a ship, Nishi had told her. Maki wondered where his ship took him. Nishi had said the ship took him to many places.

The son's curly head was withdrawn and the clatter of brass plates that followed told her of the meal in which the family was indulging. It was the midday hour, the hour at which Indians indulge in their first meal. In a few moments her own would be brought in. The sun blazed mercilessly straight down the narrow street, lighting it with punctuality for the span of moments at which it lighted it every day. The prayer gongs clanged in the numerous surrounding temples and in all the houses of the gentry. A gong was even struck in the courtyard be-

low, to tell Toton and his household it was the time for midday prayer and food.

Toton's day did not begin till this meal was over. In the morning he sat in a wooden chair airing his flabby flesh and immense stomach on the pavement. Maki had seen him by pressing her face very hard against the lattice and looking straight down the five stories. Toton chatted familiarly with the passers-by, who were also bare-bodied. Sometimes he glanced through an English paper. On such occasions he was questioned by his many acquaintances, and even by unknown passers-by who were eager to know the news of the day, and respected Toton's astonishing learning. The people in that gully were very ignorant. Very few of them worked in English offices.

When this morning diversion was over, a diversion of about two hours, liberally allowed in order that he might feel thoroughly awake at the end of it, Toton would take himself to the river-side to bathe in the holy water of the Ganges brought down by the river Hughli. By the time this was done, and the solitary garment of dress donned, the gongs clanged out the midday hour and

Toton retired to meal and prayer. Meal-time was a much more diverting affair for Toton than it was for little Maki. Toton ate lavishly, and of the very best and richest. For that matter so did Maki. But whereas Toton had a crowd of attendants around him to talk to while he was eating—orders to give and instructions to have carried out, or diverting and facetious remarks to indulge in—poor little Maki was all by herself, except for the big glaring watchful eyes of her new attendant, Brhomo. Toton often transacted business while he was eating. Callers came and were told to sit down and were talked to. At any rate Toton's voice was never silent. He seemed to think to talk was an aid to digestion. To-day, too, his tongue was wagging. Maki, while she pursued her silent meal four floors higher under the large staring eyes of Brhomo, could hear the loud-lunged bray of her father, "Why is that corner step broken? All servants must be told to step on the middle of each stone. I cannot have cemented steps repaired every day. My money does not grow on trees, remember."

There were many steps broken all round,

with the cement crumbling. Toton's warning was issued almost every morning.

The *mali*¹ had come with the sacred *tulsi*² plant in his palm, and bowed himself lowly before his master.

"The earthenware pot, my master, that contained this plant has broken. May I have your orders to fetch another."

"Broken"—Maki could hear her father exclaim in a loud voice that was almost a howl—"you son of a pig, this is the third time in one week that pot has broken. How has it broken?"

"The bull, my master, the holy bull——"

"Do not tell me of the bull, you lying dog. That is an old story. The holy bull would not destroy the pot of a holy plant."

"But it did, my master——"

"Do not answer me, you low caste thief. It is you who break the pots on purpose, wanting the few coppers you can make in purchasing another. I know your type, you lying dog."

The man was silent. He bowed his head meekly.

“ Did you or did you not break it? ”

Having been admonished once the man was discreetly silent.

“ Answer me, you cheeky idiot. Am I not talking to you? ”

“ Yes, sir. ”

“ Did you or did you not break it? ”

“ No, my master. I did not break it. ”

“ You . . . ”

The *malik* had flung himself on the floor, and touched his master's feet.

“ But if you say, I did, my master, who am I to deny it? ”

“ Do not do it again then. The next time it breaks I shall break your head. Do you understand me? ”

“ I do, my chief. ”

Toton was no more tyrannical than the ordinary master. Both Indians and Europeans find that servants are best controlled by bullying. Threats of so violent a nature as that made by Toton, it need hardly be said, are never carried out; the warning alone often suffices.

In a few moments Toton was ready to make his rounds of the European offices. It was already past one o'clock. A short walk

to the tram and then in Dalhousie Square and Clive Street at about the time the sahibs are returning from luncheon. Though Toton could never be certain of this hour: sahibs were usually away at lunch almost all the time between one and three o'clock of the afternoon.

Without going up to say good-bye to Maki—Toton never thought it worth while climbing four flights of stairs merely for a show of affection—Toton was gone. No front door slammed. All doors are always ajar. The master's absence was marked only by a sudden silence. His loud voice that rang by itself through the courtyards and the scantily furnished rooms was suddenly absent. For a while everything seemed still; then a menial, expanding in the privilege, would break into song, crudely accompanied by the flute that played independently outside. Maki heard all these things. They merely made her sigh. They marked for her the passing of idle hours, during which Brhomo just sat and stared, and Maki did and undid her hair, dressing it now this way, now that, and trying on all her garments, just to afford herself some diversion. She

could not sew, or knit. She never had old enough female relatives to teach her.

One day after many weeks, during each day of which, and each hour of each day, and each minute and second of each hour, she had pondered on the virtues of life and death, concluding at the end of each reflection that there was more for her in the other world, Maki decided for the thousandth time that she would be happiest if she could kill herself. Her despondency can be imagined. There was nothing in life that held out any promise for her. She tried to sustain a hope of happiness by fanning the slight excitement she could not help having over the novelty of her approaching marriage. But she could hardly be expected to be enthusiastic over it. Her betrothed was a boy, a mere child like herself, whom she had never seen. No one had related to her a single virtue or merit that he was supposed to possess. There was nothing ever said to sustain the flickering interest in her heart that for moments existed. There were, against this, the long tedious hours, unrelieved by gossip, unbeguiled by tale telling, uncheered by conversation of any sort but orders and

replies to formal questions. Her father was no companion. He gave her the pleasure of his company by permitting himself to smoke his hookah in her presence. He rarely had anything to say to her. What had they in common? He asked her about the meals she had eaten, made a remark or two about her coming marriage and the rest was all hubble-bubble, the leisurely smoke after a day's work. Maki seemed to have very little herself to say now; Nishi, her fund of inspiration, had gone. The girl was far too respectful to permit herself the joy of questioning her father. Some terrible calamity, she felt sure, would overtake her, if she did anything so ill-advised. Deprived of diversion, Maki was exceedingly despondent. Death, she decided again and again, was the only way, and perhaps death by drowning would be the most ideal. She decided to attempt this in the cemented *howd*,¹ which served her as bath: death, after all, for her, was only a means of joining her friends in the other world.

So having despatched Brhomo on a trifling errand—to fetch some fresh *pan*

¹ Tub.

leaves—Maki undressed and immersed her slender trembling form in the bath-tub. Slowly she crouched down, sinking gradually lower and lower. The water was up to her delicately formed chin. Lower . . . the water came up to her mouth, her nose . . . bubble, bubble, bubble. . . . It was too suffocating for Maki. She stood up, crouching, her hands on one another between her knees, and paused to recover her breath. What a shame, she felt, that she had not yet died.

After some moments she made a second venture, which was scarcely more fruitful. Maki had never realized how hard it was to die. One plunge, and she was completely under water. But in a few moments lack of breath made her re-emerge, and very much exhausted Maki quitted for the moment all idea of suicide. She dried herself, and re-robed her trembling limbs, which trembled more through fear than cold. Outside, it was bright September sunshine. With jangling bangles Maki returned to her room in her beautiful silk drapery. She was scolded severely when Brhomo came in with the *pan* and found her drying her hair

by the mirror. Maki had had her morning bath; what did she now want with another?

The days following Maki was less despondent. The labour attached to quitting life made her more reconciled to keeping it. She tried to see the rosier side of everything, though there was nothing happening to lend it a colour of any sort, let alone a rosy one. Maki saw the flute-player's son. She saw his entire countenance as it was raised skywards, whistling with rounded mouth for pigeons. It was a handsome face, thin and determined, with high cheek bones and a straggling moustache that curled slightly at the corners. Maki thought his eyes paused for some instants at her own lattice-veiled face as it pressed closely against the bars to see him. Instinctively she drew away, and when she looked again his eyes were averted to the skies and his mouth drawn flat in a shrill whistle. She chided herself for having drawn away. Here was a chance of making a friend. Should she whistle to him and attract his attention? Maki wondered if she could whistle like that and drew her mouth sideways. But blow how she would no sound would issue. The flute-

player's son inserted two fingers into his mouth and sounded a clear blast, and the birds came swerving round and round just above Maki's lattice. The lad did not see Maki: he was too engrossed in his birds. Maki placed a little hand timidly by the lattice in two minds whether to show her jewelled fingers and in that way attract his attention. But timidity won the day. The pigeons returned to roost. The lad had gone in. Beneath the thatch the old flute-player's bamboo gave out the song of new loves and the long ago.

III

MAKI had now found a new diversion. Each day she watched by her lattice for the flute-player's son, pressing her face against the bars to search the street for him in all directions. The bars left their marks upon her soft skin. She longed to see him look up again, with his twinkling eyes, and to hear him whistle for his pigeons.

Sometimes she would see him pass, with a brass mug, carrying water. Then Maki would raise her arms and cause her bangles to jingle. But they were too high to be heard; and merely attracted nearer attention.

Brhomo, who was never very distant from Maki, had been busy wondering for some time at the child's disposition. The despondency had surprised her. Then she saw Maki gay, and again hopeful. Then fol-

lowed the watching by the window with leashed expectancy. Brhomo had already spoken to her. She had questioned her as to the attraction of the window, but had only received a shy evasive answer from her mistress, whose face was suffused with blushes. Brhomo contrived a hundred and one means of distracting Maki from the window. Why hadn't Maki worn her pink silk *sari*? Come along and change it. Oh, here was some food unfinished. Come along now. It mustn't be wasted. But Maki was indifferent alike to food and clothing. She was almost fretting for the vain hope of a diversion she had promised herself. The very expectancy of the affair buoyed her up. There was always a chance of the young man looking up. She would be sure this time to attract his attention. And then. . . . Merely to smile at one another would be life's one bliss and happiness. Maki had by now completely set adrift her thoughts of suicide.

But even this little joy, which Maki had herself provided, she was to be deprived of shortly. Brhomo had reported her observations to Toton, and Maki's father was

suddenly awakened to the possibility of Maki being lonely throughout the long days, with a consequent tendency of becoming despondent. He turned over in his mind the alternative of taking her to live with his sisters, and brothers' wives, in the country. He put the proposition to Maki. The child, enthusiastic about new things and pleased now with the hope of a variation from her monotonous uneventful round of existence, said yes eagerly. She had no sooner said yes than she seemed to be sorry. A cloud of regret passed over her mind at the thought of leaving old surroundings, old acquaintances, and old loves, all of which were associated with the flute-player's son who hadn't even ever seen her. But even had Maki considered this earlier she would still have had but that one answer to give her father. It isn't customary for Indian children to argue with their parents; and Toton's statement was a suggestion rather than a request, a suggestion that seemed to demand compliance. And even if it hadn't demanded compliance Maki would have been too timid to say no; too timid to follow her own desires, too timid to express her own

views, too timid, as yet, even to take her own life—that is what the *purdah* system had done for Maki.

One morning, contrary to his custom, Toton came up to see Maki before leaving the house for his round of calls in Clive Street. Toton sent up a message previously to say he was coming, a message that was shouted by the manservant from below and repeated by Brhomo to Maki. Maki had hardly time to drop her eyes and assume a demure appearance, as is always done by Indian children in the presence of their parents, when Toton arrived. He did not stay long. He had little to say. A word or two to Maki, a word to Brhomo, and he was gone. His heavy tread died away on the stairs below before the full purport of his remarks sank into Maki's brain. Toton wanted Maki to leave for the country that same night, by the Punjab mail. He himself would take her to his people. His order to Brhomo was to get a few things together; Brhomo would also be going.

Maki wandered about her little room as in a confused dream, sad because she was leaving the associations of all the life she

had yet known, sad because of the flute she would hear no more, sad because of the narrow lane below, a lane that echoed with the songs and wails of strolling mendicants of a thousand denominations, who called in turn upon Ram and Sita Ram and Allah and others; happy because of the change in life and the wonders of the world that she felt sure would at last be opened to her.

Since her father had first communicated to her that she would be soon taken to her people in Mushtipore, Maki haunted her lattice-window more than ever, much to the disconcertment of Brhomo, who was constantly chiding her to keep away. And during all that time Maki never once saw eye to eye the lad for whom she watched. She saw him pass as erstwhile with the *lota*.¹ She had not decided whether she should essay to attract his attention despite the presence of Brhomo. How could she answer for the impetus of enthusiasm? Brhomo paid regular visits to the lattice-window and peered over the shoulders of Maki. There was below but the silent lane, the strolling cows, and the lazily moving

¹ Brass mug.

forms of humanity. Above, the bunched figure of little Maki.

At eight o'clock that night Maki descended the unending stairs for the first time that she could remember and entered a red carriage that was heavily veiled with hangings, and behind her came Brhomo carrying beneath her arms bundles of red blankets tied with rough rope. From beneath the hangings was handed to Brhomo, once she was in, by two long black arms a little tin trunk, new and black and shining. Maki had been brought down in an enclosure of curtains held up by women, who moved as she moved and who succeeded in bringing her to the carriage without betraying her to masculine gaze. Not that there was any masculine gaze watching. All the men-servants had been ordered away, so that they might not even be near to see the passing curtains with their hidden burden.

Within the dark carriage the woman and the girl waited, side by side on the seat against the horses. Maki watched the brown and the white tails flicker and the hind legs move in a fidget to find an easy posture for standing. Shafts of lights were flashed from

dilapidated carriage lights upon these animated extremities that held Maki interested as she waited for the carriage to take them to the station.

The carriage waited for Toton, whose voice could be heard calling for his shawl and stick. The women out of the way, the menservants returned, and one handed Toton his cash-box, and another his keys, while a few more placed Toton's boxes on the roof of the *ghari*.

But Toton was not yet ready. There were a hundred orders to give against his return, and when these were over, and the old man's steps already turned towards the waiting carriage, two friends arrived to talk to him of diamonds.

It is surprising what a lot Maki found to hold her interest. She could see men, passers-by and servants, almost at an arm's length, nearer than she had ever seen them. All the people of the neighbourhood seemed to have gathered round to stare at her. They had never before seen a curtained carriage outside the gate of Toton Babu. Amongst these—Maki saw him clearly—was the son of the flute-player, curious and

smiling. He stood there with his father, who wore enormous side whiskers that merged into his immense moustache. None of them saw Maki. She was veiled, and in darkness.

Toton talked at his gate with his visitors; but not for long. He had his eye on his watch, and as the hour was advancing he requested his visitors to come along with him to Howrah, so that they could talk on the platform until the train started. Another *ghari* was sent for, and when they were comfortably settled Toton lifted the curtains and joined his daughter and her servant. The carriage moved. It was the first time Maki was experiencing the sensation of riding. The street boys shouted, as the object of their attention was departing, and yelled and whistled. As the *ghari* moved on Maki saw the flute-player's son leap into the air with delight, as if to express his joy at her departure. How unkind it seemed! But the lad was only giving vent to his youthful exuberance of spirit, unrestrained in the Indian world.

The carriage turned round, and squeaked and grated, and splashed mud as it moved

down narrow streets lined by bare-bodied staring humanity. The driver clicked his tongue, flashed his whip, and admonished his horses with foul mouthed imprecations. His little boy, who acted as groom, frequently jumped off the box to prod the animals with a stick and urge them onwards with a shouted "*Hut, hut.*"

From side to side Maki and Brhomo were rocked on to each other's shoulders. Neither spoke. Toton, too, was silent, thinking, perhaps, of the diamond deal he hoped to complete at the station. From the streets came endless chatter, the wails of beggars, and the inviting smell of the sweet shops. Maki, by peering between the hangings, could see the open street shops, guarded by bare-bodied, corpulent keepers, kept busy by endless throngs of customers. Each shop was lighted by a little smoky burner that sent up a small saffron light. Around the tradesmen were the serried white *rasa goolaks*,¹ the tray upon tray of *jullabis*,¹ *kachowris*¹ and *singarahs*¹ and all the condiments that can make the Indian heart glad. Next were the cloth shops, not quite so at-

¹ Varieties of Indian sweets.

tractive, nor so much upon the road-side. They were deeper and cleaner, had chairs, and red-backed account books, folded, and tied with twine. Nor were the keepers bare, but clothed and halo-hatted, fat and cunning, men of a different race, hailing from a distant part of India. Shops of perfume, loaded with exuding fragrance, the open restaurants giving out the flavour of curries, the clash of plates, and loud lunged singing of lewd songs by hearty diners, the fruit stalls kept by men from the bleak north, blue turbaned Semites like the Afghan; all passed before Maki as the *ghari* jogged along towards Howrah. The traffic upon the road was inconceivable, such as not all the statements of poor Nishi nor the intense din that penetrated into the latticed room that Maki had occupied had ever succeeded in conveying to the mind of that child. For several minutes at a time the *ghari* would be held up. Maki saw at last the mysterious, monstrous trams as they clanged their way forward, and the rattling, tooting motors. How wonderful they seemed. Just carriages gone mad, running wildly around as if in search for their horses.

Soon Maki was at the Howrah end of Harrison Road, crossing the wonderful floating bridge that stretches for a thousand feet across the Hughli. Toton placed his hands to his head in meekness before the holy river; so also did Brhomo, and Maki copied them slavishly. She saw, below, the cold steel-like river, screeching with the cry of steam launches, and alive with the song of boatmen. This was such a new world to her. Little craft sped this way and that, bathers splashed by the edge of the water, and a thousand lights flashed their rays like the teeth of combs upon the surface of the rippling river. Upon the bridge lay a heavy smell of jute, cast off by creaking bullock carts that bore their loads to the station.

At Howrah Station the curtain scene was re-enacted. Maki stepped out of the carriage into a bunch of curtains held up by attendants that had come from Toton's home, and out of them into a palanquin. Brhomo did not come with her, but walked outside, for she was of a caste that did not fear the face of males. Toton went along to buy the tickets.

The palanquin took Maki to a heavily

curtained compartment. It was one of a long train, none of the others curtained, but Maki could not as yet see the other carriages. Brhomo and she stepped in one after the other, and the palanquin was borne away by the bearers, borne away into the midst of the myriads of sleeping and moving forms that formed a carpet upon the platforms of the station and upon the enclosure in front, as each respective Indian waited with his bundle for his train to come in. The air was heavy with their many breaths. It was like being again in the congested gully from which Maki had just come. Only the world seemed so much vaster. Maki had never dreamed there were so many people in it.

Toton brought the tickets and walked on to his own compartment. Maki and Brhomo were in the curtained carriage, and already in their bunks lay two heavily bejewelled Indian women, both in converse with their menfolk who stood outside the curtains. Maki could not understand what they were saying. There are a thousand different tongues in Hindustan, and she knew but one of them.

Toton chattered with his friends on the

platform and transacted his business, agreeing to buy some diamonds the men had brought with them and to take delivery on his return, which he hoped would be at the end of a week. He called a question to Maki as he passed her compartment, asking if she was comfortably settled. Maki murmured a soft reply. How queer her voice seemed to sound at that moment. The engine whistled. The guard called out something. Maki could just see him from under the curtains, as she sat up, wave a green flag after blowing a whistle, and slowly the heavy house which she was in puffed her out of the station and its noisy, smelly, yelling inhabitants.

Maki was soon in the fresh air, beholding the paddy fields and telegraph posts as they passed her silently in that moonlit night. She never tired of watching them. Here was a hut, there a cluster of them; now Maki could hear one villager call to another, and again a dog yelp, scared by the noise and fire of the passing engine. All the time there were swamps and green fields and the queer posts holding aloft wires, as if to keep away from the fields, within its own en-

closure, this immense noisy thing that was madly rushing her forward. Maki was called for the dozenth time by Brhomo and bade to slumber. But Maki could not sleep, though she stopped peering out. She just lay in her berth and turned over in her mind the enormous world she had seen within the past few hours. She sighed for her little room. How lost she felt in so vast a space.

In a little while the rain fell heavily, and with its noisy splashing and the jolt of movement, Maki fell asleep, a sleep from which she was frequently awakened by a worse than ordinary jolting. Whenever she awoke it was only to lie wide eyed and reflect on the many wonders she had seen, until she fell asleep again.

It had been truly a wonderful evening for Maki.

IV

AT half-past two in the morning the Punjab mail drew up at a little wayside station, not too little to be unimportant, and a rapid rapping at Maki's compartment door made her sit up. It was the menfolk of the jewelled women come to tell them that the next stop would be theirs. At the next stop the women departed amid much chattering and giggling and Brhomo and Maki had the compartment to themselves. In another half-hour one of the servants travelling with Toton came to rouse them. The next stop, he said, would be theirs. Brhomo got busy. There were the blankets and bedding to be put together, and that done they sat with folded hands staring out into the chilly half light of the early morning. The rain had stopped.

It was not yet dawn when Maki stepped

out of the train at the station that was her destination, into the uplifted curtains. Without, she could hear the voice of her father, a quivering speech that indicated the effect of the cold morning upon his constitution. Maki stepped out of the curtains into a palanquin, which was borne away down an unkept village track, to the singing and swaying of the Ooriyah bearers. Toton and Brhomo jogged along together on an open bullock-cart, the servants walking beside them. Toton dozed and nodded. Brhomo chewed the betel nut. Maki, with her insatiable curiosity, peered out of the curtains of the palanquin.

Outside visibility was not yet clear. Everything seemed grey and damp and biting cold. A few flickering lights glowed orange amongst the bushes, seeming the only real things in that unreal light. Maki found enough in this sleepy early morning world to hold her interest. The ploughmen were not yet at work, and the cows were all assembled in squatting slumber around the villages. But she loved to hear the sing-song of the palanquin bearers, which seemed to say to her:

“ Who are we carrying?
Isn't she heavy?
Who are we carrying?
Isn't she heavy? ”

Every half-hour they stopped and changed shoulders. Maki yawned and watched till the sun was high and the busy round of a morning in the country had been far advanced. She had already tired of the recurring villages, of their dogs and staring women, and the ploughed fields with their busy workers. They all seemed the same; and she had watched them for five hours. The bare hairy legs of the bearers dripped with sweat from the protruding sinews, and the dripping arms swung backwards and forwards.

At length the bullock-cart in the lead came to a stop and the bearers stopped too. The palanquin was set down, to be taken up again some moments later, as, following Toton, it entered the porch of a large house. Again the curtains were held up and amidst them Maki walked up flights and flights of stairs to the women's quarters.

There she was at once the object of pet-

ting and kissing. All her father's sisters and her uncles' wives tenderly kissed her on both cheeks and on eyes and forehead. Maki had never had so many kisses in her life before. Her father had kissed her nightly, but they were purely perfunctory. Nishi's had been respectful, bestowed on Maki's fingers mainly.

Maki's younger cousins crowded the doorway, shyly hiding their heads amongst the hangings, waiting to be called for introduction, and staring at odd moments at their new-found cousin. When they came forward they in turn kissed Maki, and then Maki was taken to her old blind grandmother who felt the child all over her face and said it was exactly like its father, whereas Maki had in reality more of her mother's delicate features. The blind old woman kissed Maki and blessed her, thanked Heaven that she should at last have seen her seventeenth grandchild, and four great-grandchildren; and declared herself ready for death at that precise instant. All Maki's younger cousins and her married cousins' children laughed disrespectfully at the old lady. It was obvious that they considered her demented.

At the midday hour all the men came up for their meal, which the women had cooked for them, and the women stood round while the men fed, as it is not the custom for women to eat till the men have finished. Maki was the object of interest amongst her uncles, not all of whom she had seen previously. One was the benevolent Nogen who was always touching her tenderly, and had kind and encouraging things to say to her. The other was the young and foolish Moshi, a boy, and still the father of six children. These she had seen in Calcutta on their visits to her father, and now Moshi teased again and was chided by Nogen.

In the afternoon when the sweltering sun makes the atmosphere drowsy, Maki was left to play with the other children, while the older women took themselves to slumber.

The children were of all sizes, from tottering mites with stomachs as round as drums, to shy ungainly girls and boys, noisy and naked, that romped about in and out of the many rooms there were in the women's quarter. It is a curious thing about Indian parents that they will indulge their children,

whether it be in food or in vocal liberty. The result of the former is the inflated frontage, taut almost to a point of bursting, which makes the infants top heavy and their legs bandy.

Maki did not find the people at all diverting. To tell the truth they did not take very much, for their part, to Maki. She was not in the least bit like them. She was such a quiet child, not a whit disposed to be friendly. She eyed them with such curiosity, such a scared expression as they tried to pull her and haul her into their frivolity. The girls of Maki's age were all married and mothers. They regarded her as a peculiarity of the species. Maki was not married, had borne no children, knew nothing about handling infants and their ways, she was unacquainted with cooking and the simplest of household duties and in their ignorant childish way her cousins rather despised her.

At the end of a week Toton returned to Calcutta. Maki at first found life here fairly diverting. At various times in the day she was questioned by her grandmother, by her aunts and by her elder cousins. Maki had

little to say. Her life had been so uneventful. She talked of the different things at different times she had eaten, which of them she liked, and there were suggestions on all hands as to what new delights of this nature should be given her. Almost every member in the family had a faculty for preparing some particular choice morsel. There was much in the way of eating Maki had to look forward to.

All the older women, past the age of bearing children of their own, were engaged in the unending occupation of making socks and shirts for expected babies—they did not know whose in particular: babies were always being born in that household.

Maki was interested for some days by these things because of their novelty, but before long she realized how lonely one can feel in a large crowd, much more so, in fact, here than when she had been by herself. Once she had solitude and her own thoughts. Now she hadn't even solitude in which to indulge her passing fancies. There was ever the piercing shriek of a delighted baby cousin as it was hiding and finding itself

again in and out of the different rooms. There was always a good deal of howling and crying by overfed, dyspeptic, irritable, spoilt children. Maki felt she never wanted any children; yet how could she help it? Her marriage was quite near at hand now; under a year perhaps. Maki longed for the sound of the flute-player's pipe, and for her little window with the lattice that looked down into that diverting alley, full of life and sound and human beings; where her flute-player's son looked up as he whistled for his pigeons; where he always passed with his little *lota*.

What was there to see in this silly country? The windows were in the first place too high, and there were no stools near them. There were too many eyes on her for her to drag one into position; and she felt the family would undoubtedly be scandalized if they saw her mount it. Nobody seemed interested in the outer world here: they had enough to do indoors to absorb them. And Maki knew there would be little enough that the window could offer for her diversion. She had seen the country on the day of her

arrival. If you have seen it once you have seen it for all time; it was ever unchanging. To a bird in a cage the wide expanses of the country stand for light and air, and make it long for flights above the vast fields that lie silently around. But Maki could not fly, and for her the pleasures of the bird had no individual appeal. She loved life. She loved a spot where she could have the ever changing panorama of the world before her eyes, passing beneath her window. She longed for a room looking out on Harrison Road. She had seen the trams, and the motors, the wonderful inventions of the clever English. How she longed to see them again!

At the end of several weeks, more despondent than ever with thinking, Maki had worked herself with her thoughts to the verge of madness. She decided again on suicide; but determined this time to adopt a different method from the one previously attempted. Drowning was much too strenuous. She would kill herself by jumping. She could jump from the balcony on to the cemented courtyard five floors below. And then . . .

When the children were asleep and the women chattering and making socks and garments Maki stepped out into the deserted balcony, heavily screened from the outer world with cane chicks that were darkened by cloth of a deep blue. Maki lifted one of these chicks and slipped her lithe form outside it. Then she climbed carefully over the railings on to the ledge beyond, her slippers almost slipping off her feet and arousing the attention of the household. She clutched the railings nervously behind her. The height of the fall made her for a moment shudder. A fountain stood in the centre of the court, spouting out water in uncertain jets. An instant Maki hesitated. Then as one of the women within noticed her form, darkly outlined outside the *pardah*, and screamed through sheer fright, Maki quickly decided, and releasing her hold behind took her jump before attention to her could actually be attracted.

The screams brought a crowd to all the balconies almost instantaneously, and the *durwan*¹ and others assembled in the court-

¹ Gate-keeper.

yard into which Maki was falling. A woman on a balcony below the one from which Maki had jumped saw a form descending, and stretched out her arms to clutch it. A grip was closed on several folds of Maki's *sari*; but, as the garment is an unstitched length, the weight of Maki's body simply unrolled itself out of it, and the garment alone was left in the grip of the woman, who yelled with terror. The *durwan*, a powerful Sikh, with parted beard, who stood in the courtyard below caught in his arms Maki's naked form, scantily covered with beautiful long black tresses. Maki, though a child, had fully developed womanhood. Hers was a beautiful skin, a pale olive, and smooth as velvet. Her eyes soft and shy, shone black through the coloured skin. Her hair was bright to a point of aliveness, and prettily wavy. Maki fell into the big Sikh's arms with great force, but he caught her firmly. She was almost stunned by the impact, but unhurt. Yet she shook with fear, for even while contemplating death she dreaded it. She thought not a moment of modesty, though her exposed back was nude

from head to heels, covered only by the broad hands of the tall Sikh as he held her in her fall.

The Sikh was quick of brain and in a moment took in the situation. He pressed Maki to him, and covered her form with a male garment that hung in the courtyard on a string, upon which it had been hung out to dry. The Sikh carried her upstairs, her form warm and trembling against him. He set her down outside the zenana, and Maki slipped her nude figure through the hangings.

Around her stood the entire female section of the household. They giped her and taunted her and spat freely upon her. Maki had not only exposed herself to the gaze of man other than her husband, but she had revealed herself in all her nakedness! She was indeed a child of the devil.

The stout Sikh, meanwhile, was chided and severely scolded by Maki's uncles. He had no right to hold Maki or to behold her nakedness.

“But I saved her life, my masters.”

“Such a child were better dead, better

dead than that she should live after man had seen her."

The Sikh was thereupon dismissed from service.

NEWs was speedily sent to Toton, and he was naturally much concerned about it. He hastened to Mushtipore and together with the others concluded that the child must be possessed of the devil. The country was searched for witches, and women working in black magic, and their united efforts were bent on the exorcizing of the evil spirit that they felt certain was in possession of Maki.

The poor child was for days subjected to untold torture. Twice a day the evil spirit was beaten with canes, beaten so that he might leave the body, and Maki had to endure all the agony of this punishment. Then plantain leaves were placed upon her stomach, and dead spiders burnt and cotton wool soaked in oil and set alight, till the whole place smelt. Then branding irons

would be placed upon such parts of Maki's body as were thought to be vital to the spirit in possession, and at the end of ten days it was pronounced that the evil spirit had probably departed. Maki was ill for many days after, but it was thought by the others of her family that this was the natural weakness caused by the passing of the evil spirit. All this while Toton stayed in the country with his daughter and lost much business; for it was the jute season, and the Stock Exchange in Calcutta was very active. He was sorry for Maki, she was his own child and he could not leave her. He attributed her troubles to her having been kept from marriage to an age far beyond the normal. Maki was only sixteen, but for an Indian it was quite unnatural that she was unmarried. Toton blamed his own selfishness for her troubles, and decided to hasten the union before further trouble set in. The pent up energy of the child would find an outlet in motherhood. It was the pent up energy that had caused the blood to rush to the head, and had brought on a form of insanity.

The arrangements for the marriage were

well afoot. Toton went back to Calcutta and ordered a large quantity of paper festoons with which to hang his house for the marriage festivities. Maki and Brhomo were also brought down, and all little Maki's spirits returned as she saw again her little lattice, the narrow lane below, and the pigeons fluttering above in the blue yard of sky visible. The flute-player still played his pipe; but his son was no longer there. He passed no more with his *lota*, nor whistled to the birds. He had gone, Maki thought, back to his steamer.

Toton was busier than Maki over the wedding arrangements. Maki had only herself to prepare, and she was ready. Toton had to arrange a show, a lavish feast, the feeding of beggars, the engaging of bands and the inviting of friends. All his European business friends were invited and a rare nautch was promised them.

The bridegroom's people meanwhile made separate preparations. In Indian weddings there is usually a double celebration at one and the same time when a couple are married. The bride's people and the groom's

people prepare separate feasts, and invite their respective friends to them. The bridegroom goes with a band and procession to fetch his bride, and she veiled heavily and in a shuttered carriage, and he held aloft on a gaily decked platform, borne high on the shoulders of retainers, thread the streets, while the Indian bagpipes squeal and the tom-toms thump, and the street boys run delighted in and out, between the legs of the chattering lamp-bearers.

There was a heavy smell of acetylene gas, much yelling of instructions to the procession to keep in line, while the bored groom sat silent not moving a muscle and was fanned by enormous fans waved by painted attendants . . . and Maki was married.

Arrived at her new home, Maki awaited her husband in the women's quarter on the topmost story, and peeped through the blue cane chicks down into the lighted courtyard below, where her husband sat, the centre of attraction. Here a reception was held by her husband's father. It was the town house of the titled magnate, a Rai Bahadur who chose to call himself a Rajah. He was not actually a Rajah, for he owned no inde-

pendent state, yet wealthy Indian landowners often usurp this appellation.

The Rajah sahib held the reception. The courtyard was carpeted and left clear for a few yards in the centre, while around, on three sides, were row upon row of chairs filled with the bulky forms of Indian men. All wealthy Indians are bulky; it is the rich food that gives them this girth. At each of their two meals a day, at midday and at midnight, they eat enough to last them for the hours intervening. A camel method, but not wholly suited to the human anatomy. There is a great strain imposed on the digestive organs, and Indians are generally dyspeptic.

The Indians attended the marriage festivities in their silks and satins and twisted linen mufflers that they wore in an immaculate plait round their brown necks. They all wore garlands of little white flowers, and held in their hands large buttonholes. Their lips were red with *pan*, which they chewed endlessly. Servants went round at intervals with trays bearing more *pan* and cloves and spices. They were all telling each other the most intimate affairs of their families;

and the air of the place was noisy and disconcerting.

On two sofas and some chairs placed in one of the verandas opening on to the courtyard sat the European visitors—a few ladies and a number of men—and other men were standing, while loud cries were raised by the host and the members of his family—including the most distantly connected—for chairs for the sahibs. In the cleared space in the centre of the assembly two grey-whiskered and stout *sithar* players, and a gaunt head-wagging, tom-tom thumper followed an Indian nautch girl in her peregrinations, as she danced in the intervals of singing. They followed her wherever she went within the limits of the cleared space, and laid stress with their heads upon the most amatory portions of her several songs. She sang the usual songs of Hindustan, that told of the maiden's love and the man's desertion; and was joined in snatches by the Indian listeners, who sang a phrase every time almost they finished a sentence of conversation. And then the woman danced. She jangled her feet bangles, and drummed her heels upon the

floor, advancing, retreating, and saucily pirouetting. She shook her hips and raised her arms in weird gyrations. The Europeans smiled at all this. It was a novelty and as such interesting. Ordinarily a European lives for years in Calcutta without seeing Indian dancing. They whispered amongst themselves, and laughed heartily.

Their host, the Rajah, whose eyes were already shining with liquor, stooped down towards the nearest.

"How are you enjoying?" he queried.

"Very much, thank you," came a chorused rejoinder, in which feminine voices were evident. And then one female voice above the others, "I think it's simply delightful."

"I want that you will enjoy," said her host, and then loudly "*Hai*."

A crowd of retainers looked towards him. One of the *sithar* players turned his head too, out of curiosity. The host was not looking at his servants. "*Hai*," he called again. The *sithar* player turned once more and caught the eye of the Rajah.

"Tell the girl to sing an English song,"

said the Rajah, raising his voice above the singing and drumming.

The girl stopped her singing. She consulted, for a moment, her peripatetic orchestra, waving a dainty forefinger and wagging her chin as she hummed a low refrain. The *sithar* players tried a few chords, then the girl hummed again. The drum beater was indifferent. There was never any variation in his thumping. The girl raised an arm. Her mouth opened and she sang:

“ Mai loff ees laike ay leetle burd,
Dat flies away fram tree to tree,
And wain he sees aynother burd,
Hees loff no langer stays far me.”

Her arms made the most absurd gestures. It was obvious she understood not a word of what she was singing. The *sithar* players strummed the strings and wagged their heads in obvious enjoyment.

“ Ah, geef me ay pain, un sam paper,
Ah, geef me a pain, un sam paper.”

“Ho, ho,” said the drummer, looking at the ceiling and continuing his thumping.

Then the girl:

“Ah-h-h-h-h-h. Geef me ay pain un sam paper,
Ah, geef me ay pain un sam paper,
Geef me ay pain un sam paper.”

She pirouetted at the end of each line, the skirt of her *sari* billowing saucily, and the tom-tom player said “Ho, ho,” at intervals, just to show that he was really enthusiastic. Then the girl, coming in at last with the final line,

“To wraite mai darlin’ loff laitter.
To wraite mai darlin’ loff laitter.”

The last line was repeated seven times, and then more dancing was indulged in. The Europeans were almost doubled with laughter. The ladies tried their hardest to suppress their shrieks, but could ill control them. Their host, delighted with such manifestation of their pleasure, called for another song in English, sacrificing thus the interest of a thousand Indian friends for barely a dozen English. He little knew that the

English enjoyed the girl's Indian songs much more than they did those she sang in English. They are always hearing songs in English, besides her accent was far too absurd not to be laughed at. It would have been a kindness to her to tell her not to sing in English; but the English were far too polite to say so.

Whisky was passed round for the sahibs, and coloured wines for the ladies; then sweets and chocolates. The Indian section of the assembly consisted only of men, but the women of the Rajah's family and little Maki peeped from the balcony above. She could get just a glimpse of her husband. It was for the first time she saw him. He seemed just a boy. And there were crowds and crowds of other men, all dressed so gaudily. Maki saw the Europeans, wondered at the discomfort of the men's stiff dress shirt fronts, and marvelled at the brazenness and semi-nudity of the European women.

"Are these Englishwomen, the servants of the men they have come with?" she asked of a woman near her.

The woman laughed at her simplicity.

"Servants. None of the English are servants. These are their wives and their daughters. Their women have no shame in them."

Maki agreed to herself that it was indeed disgraceful. What did she know of feminine freedom.

After some moments the Europeans went in to supper, when Indian sweets dripping with juice were served them on leaves that they could not defile by their touch. They ate with their fingers and laughed as they tried to avoid the juice falling on their garments. Their host did not follow them in here. They ate alone, while his servants waited. And when they had done they were taken one by one into a back landing where water was poured by an attendant upon their dirty fingers. They enjoyed a good deal of this for its novelty.

When the festivities were over Maki met her husband and received her first kiss in life from her lover. It was a kiss filled with passion, for Maki was beautiful and her husband's young blood was already stirred within him. From Maki there was little response. She knew nothing yet of love,

and instinct prompted her nothing. Her husband was not of so lovable a type as to awaken within her all her dormant feelings. She submitted because she felt she had to, though not without a slight resistance. All the women of her father's family, and even her father had told her often enough to submit to everything her husband wanted, to grant him his every whim, and to obey him in the slightest particular.

At the end of a week, during which she spent her days in her husband's arms and her evenings in peeping through the balcony curtains to witness the singing and dancing in the courtyard below, Maki and her husband, and her husband's family migrated to the paternal home in the country. There they had an enormous house with an armed man at the gate on guard, and all the pomp becoming to a Rajah.

Maki was installed in the family zenana with seven sisters-in-law, three mothers-in-law—for her husband's father indulged liberally in matrimony—and her husband's step-grandmother. Of all these the old lady alone took to her kindly—contrary to all rules of an Indian household as depicted in

novels, where the old ladies that rule the zenana are made to resent the arrival of the latest bride bitterly, the more so if she is young and beautiful. There was no cause for the old woman to turn from Maki. Toton had been lavish in the dowry he gave with his daughter, and this is a very big consideration in the bridegroom's household. All the other women who had entered the household by marriage seemed to resent the old woman's interference and hated her cordially. Maki did not resent anybody's interference. The other brides were in league to oppose the old woman and they expected Maki to join them. Maki was hardly concerned with their quarrels. The zenana was divided into two camps. The old woman had on her side blood relatives, and between the two camps there were frequent pitched battles. Once a granddaughter-in-law threw a knife at the old lady and made a deep gash on her left fore arm. Another time a daughter of the old woman emptied a can of milk over the dark, oiled tresses of a sister-in-law. The old lady was called "Ma," respectfully by all in the

zenana, despite their individual attitude towards her.

“Ma” wanted a new friend—and she regarded Maki as a reinforcement—so she was as sweet to Maki as could be. The other brides also tried hard to win her. Maki’s right place, they felt, would have been alongside the other brides of the household. But Maki had no idea of camps and quarrels. She had been taught as a child to respect age. Here was an old lady exceedingly kind to her, and in every way considerate; without a shadow of animosity that she could see against the others. And all these insolent young girls who were not actually related to her—except, of course, by marriage—were as rude to her as could be, telling her the most unkind and cutting things and calling her “mother” at the same time.

So despite the place to which her marriage into the family should have assigned her, feeling led Maki into an alliance with “Ma.” Not that she was in any way committal in her attitude. But “Ma” had a way of appealing to her listeners every time

she had a quarrel, in order to solicit views from them, and Maki was frequently appealed to for her opinion. Poor little Maki, too little to form an opinion, let alone air it.

Before very long Maki had done and said things that committed her definitely to the side of her step-grandmother. From that hour her enemies in that household could be numbered by the dozen. Those that had married into the family were more numerous than those that were in it. Most of the old lady's daughters had gone away to live with their husbands. Only a few had brought their husbands to live on the Rajah.

Maki was singled out for particular hatred because it was felt that she was a deserter. She was not a blood relation of "Ma-jee"; why then should she have left them and gone over to her? Really quite a stupid child, and so abominably ignorant, they felt. She could not even prepare her husband's meals (the old lady, though, was doing her best to teach her); how on earth would she be able to look after her baby? Maki, they thought, should already be showing signs of motherhood.

Her husband, a boy of seventeen, was a lad of marked temper and no character. Spoilt by birth because of a slight physical infirmity, Ranjit—as he was called—had been indulged to a point of spoiling. The only thing he had ever attempted was the study of English, which he pursued in a desultory fashion while in Calcutta. A young English master had been engaged to teach him, but the boy attended when the mood seized him, and frequently sent the master away or kept him waiting when feeling a trifle seedy. The result of all this was that in the course of five years he had perhaps had two dozen complete lessons, and knew just a fragmentary English that he tried to speak and failed in superbly. Just before the marriage the father thought the lad sufficiently equipped to compete for the Calcutta Matriculation. The master said he would try and coach him if the boy attended regularly but could give no cause to be hopeful, yet books were bought for this advanced study and Ranjit set out to learn French and Latin before he had mastered the rudiments of English. When his marriage was hastened—as it was at Toton's

urging—the master received a summary dismissal with the promise that he would be called in again if the mood took Ranjit to enter for the examination after his marriage. “But that will not be,” said the Rajah, “for at least another year. We must give the boy some time for enjoying.” The master was then asked if he was married and surprise was evinced that one grown to the age of twenty-five had not yet been wedded. “But these English have strange ways,” reflected the Rajah. “They do not enjoy life until they are too old to enjoy it.”

The Rajah was possessed of a strong face of the Roman type, a face almost like that of Augustus Cæsar. But it was marked with years, and over-indulgence, and his jaws were disfigured by double chins that were now only flabby. He was a man of brain when he chose to exercise it; but he was generally too lazy to tax it. His servants and friends—there were a great number of hangers-on in his establishment, men without pay but who were glad enough to be given just their food, and who gave a suggestion of being courtiers of royalty—fawned

upon the Rajah and fed him with flattery. He delighted in all this and frequently did foolish things, because it made his courtiers shake their chins and say what a wonderful man the Rajah was. He lived in a village backwater, and came into Calcutta for diversion, self-indulgence and English society, which he cultivated for some fanciful reason. His house was appointed in the English manner, with telephones from one room to another. The Rajah loved to talk from his "office" to his secretary—a bloated individual who occasionally scribbled notes for the Rajah—who had his "office" in the next room. The talking across wires was very delightful to the Rajah. There were three pianos in the house and an auto player, on all of which the infants strummed as they were lifted into position by indulging servants. Another room had an immense billiard-table, which was bought merely because the canvasser who had called to sell it gave proofs to show that almost every other Rajah had one. It was costly and the Rajah felt it must consequently be worth having. He had not the vaguest notion as

to what billiards were and regarded the table no differently from any other in his possession. A silver bowl with flowers was placed in the centre, while around almost anybody put anything he wanted to. There were a number of *pan* boxes, a blotter and a pen-rack, though the Rajah did admit the table was a trifle troublesome to write on; while children lifted on to it by way of diversion lost no time in digging the point of the paper-cutter into the green cloth. There were in consequence some nasty scars upon the surface. Inks of two colours had also been spilt upon it, while in a corner lay some ash fallen out of an ash-tray.

Rangit had inherited some of his father's features, but he had his mother's weak chin that fitted incongruously with his firm upper outline. His infirmity was twisted arms and legs, caused by a fall his mother had received at a stage slightly preceding maternity. The boy was outgrowing his defects gradually, but the indulgence meted out to him by the others because of his misfortune had spoilt him to an extent he would never outgrow. Perhaps Toton was wrong in

giving Maki to so faulty a husband. But Indian parents keep their eyes merely on birth and money. Ranjit had both. In justice to Toton, though, be it said, he did for a moment consider Ranjit's infirmity, but dismissed it again with the thought that the boy was bound to outgrow it.

Maki did not know this. She only saw that her husband was different from the others, different also from the flute-player's stately son, whom she had not seen on her return to Calcutta after her stay with her father's people. How she longed again for Calcutta.

After her marriage, during the first ten days that the wedded pair were in Calcutta, Maki had lived in the Rajah's town house that stood in a by-lane off Cornwallis Street. There was nothing to see from the lattice except the backyard of a neighbour's dwelling, where servants flitted and clothes fluttered in the wind. No flute-player, no passing mendicant, no singing, except a stray phrase from a servant on his duties; but the eternal screeching of a captive parrot. The bird was the only living thing Maki could

make friends with and from that height she made its acquaintance. The bird never spoke; it was much too stupid, and Maki sarcastically named it "*Guru*," which means "Professor." The bird was not in the least bit responsive, but cawed at its portion of dried corn from its perch on a brass bar. The foot of the bird was made secure by a short chain. Often the bird was stupid enough to go to sleep and to nod off its bar and dangle from the chain, head downwards. Then the din that would follow; for the bird had not enough understanding to climb back again into position by using its beak as other parrots do. It cawed, and screeched till it was assisted, which was sometimes not for hours; for servants were out or else indifferent. Sometimes Maki felt she could run down and restore it, talk to it and teach it a language; be a friend to the lonely bird and make it cheer her lonely self. The thought of her last incursion downstairs, however, would crowd back into her mind; of her naked shivering self, in the arms of the strong Sikh, and the awful persecution that followed, connected with the exorcizing of the devil. Maki would gladly have sent

down a servant to assist the bird, but she was new in the household and as yet the servants were not her servants.

VI

IN Sonarpuri, the country seat of the Rajah, to which Maki was taken by Ranjit, she had very little time to herself, and such a lot to think about. Her horizon had been widened by her recent activities. She had seen much in her few stray trips across sections of Calcutta, to provide food for many days' thought. In driving to her future home off Cornwallis Street on the night of her wedding Maki had passed in that principal thoroughfare interesting houses ablaze with light and they had been explained to her by Brhomo, on Maki's questioning, as places of magic diversion. What did Brhomo know of the cinema? She had been once to see these "devil" pictures, a servant of her own caste had taken her when he paid her court; but Brhomo had run away from the pictures

frightened. It was no use her companion telling her that there are thousands here to whom no harm had happened, and that these are but pictures. Pictures, Brhomo knew, could not move, and if these stirred they were not ordinary pictures. How could dead things stir unless aided by the devil? Could trees talk? Or chairs? Or tables? No. But her companion knew of a box that talked and took her down Bow Bazaar where an enterprising dealer played his gramophone by his gate; and this terrified Brhomo more than ever. Brhomo told all these things to Maki. Maki had set her talking of things that had once made a deep impression in Brhomo's life.

That other brilliant building with its front outlined in lights, and the many coloured lights above the entrance was a theatre. There music was played and women danced and sang, and men and women acted stories. It was all splendour and gold within, the nearest Maki could conceive of Nirvana.

"And do women not go there?" she asked.

"Not decent women. At least not women

of your class. I can go, though I am not indecent."

"Then why am I born in this class? Why can I not enjoy life like the others?"

"The will of Heaven, Maki."

"Then I must have sinned¹ terribly in my previous existences that I should be made to suffer still for it."

Brhomo merely shrugged her shoulders. She did not know sufficiently about such things to offer an explanation. She did not at the same time wish to show that Maki was not cursed, but privileged. She had already said that she herself could attend a theatre. Why should she make out that she was cursed for things she felt she may not have committed in a past life?

"And have you been in there?" asked Maki.

"Yes. I worked once for a theatrical lady. She was fat and beautiful. That is to say she was made up to look beautiful, with black *surma*¹ in the corners of her eyes, and black on her brows and her lips shortened with deep red."

¹ Liquid made from charcoal.

“How wonderful!”

“She used to make a lot of money. I hear her father was a *boxwallah*.¹ He never had much money. He used to go round the town with a boxful of soaps and scents and laces, hawking his wares and singing out the variety of his goods.”

“Oh!” said Maki reminiscently. “I think I have heard one like him.”

“Where? In your father’s house? No. They do not pass that way. They go round generally in the *Belaiti*² quarter. It is the foreigners who buy such things. That must have been a sweet man you heard. Was he not saying, ‘*Golab lawrie*,³ *rasgoolah*’?”

“Oh, yes. That was it.” Maki was deeply interested. She did not know Brhomo had so vast a knowledge. She was telling her of things that poor Nishi had never heard about. Brhomo, too, realized that Maki was at last grown up and could be told things. Was this not the day of her marriage? Yet what queer things to talk about on one’s wedding day.

¹ Hawker.

² English.

³ Kinds of Indian sweets.

“And the actress? This lady you used to work for?”

“Nothing more. Just that she was rich and had a lot of money, and heaps and heaps of admirers. Men used to wait for her after the theatre with flowers and drive her home in their motor-cars, and give her endless presents.”

“And how is it you did not become an actress, Brhomo? You, too, would have had all these things. It must be really wonderful.”

“I? My Lord! What do I know of such things? To sing! To dance! To place the hand on the breast like this and say, ‘I love you alone, my heart; pray do not leave me.’” Brhomo lowered her voice to a deep bray as she said it.

Maki laughed loudly. It was really funny to hear Brhomo say it, the staid, stern Brhomo. Who would have thought she could say and do such things?

The laugh rang out by itself as the carriage in which Brhomo and Maki were driving came to a halt inside the Rajah's courtyard, and Toton who had been following in another vehicle came forward to help

the bride into the covered chair in which she was to be borne into the women's quarter.

That night Maki had her first glimpse into what she considered a form of the theatre when she beheld the nautch girl singing and dancing. This woman, too, must be making a lot of money. Maki wondered how much her father-in-law had had to pay her to engage her. She scanned the faces of the men, asking herself which were the admirers. She saw no flowers. Perhaps they would give her the garlands they wore; perhaps there were flowers in the motors. Had all these men motors? And in whose car would she go home? And what about the musicians? Possibly they would walk home. But why this difference? Maki had always known that women were of no account in the reckoning. They always gave way to men. And now. Three men were to walk home while a slip of a girl had the choice of a hundred motors. Why? she asked herself; and had no answer. Perhaps because the girl was beautiful. But that could hardly be it; Brhomo had said they paint on their beauty. Oh, it must be that the girl can sing and dance; that was surely

an accomplishment. There were not many women who could sing and dance. The most of them cooked merely. Those that cooked were not driven home in motors. And what could she herself do? Maki shook her head sadly as she realized—nothing.

Maki was herself to drive in a motor ten days later when the family left for the country. But the pleasure was lost because there were a large number of them squeezed into that vehicle, and curtains hung heavily on all sides; and Maki was too hemmed in between the others to move her head into a position to notice that the horses were missing. An unusual purring did proclaim a difference that was out of the ordinary. But then it was a Rajah's *ghari*, and decidedly more spacious, and a trifle differently constructed. It stopped in jerks and went off in jerks, just as a train did. It was not till some days later, when Maki sighed to go in a motor, that Brhomo told her she was brought in one from her father-in-law's home to the railway station. It was soon after that that Brhomo quitted service. She did not like living continuously in the country. So when the month ended she

departed. Maki felt this badly, for since her marriage a new friendship had been cemented between herself and Brhomo.

Maki used to amuse herself in the daytime by humming airs and trying dance steps in the privacy of her own room; though, forsooth, there was precious little privacy. Doors stood always ajar, and the other members of the family, including the tiniest mites, trooped in and out, as they liked. Maki dared not say a word to them or exclude them by fastening the door; such action would have been considered peculiar. It might have been interpreted as a form of devil possession, and Maki knew what agonies that would necessitate.

So she preferred to dance and hum as opportunity offered—in her bath or whilst she was dressing. Once when the family was more absorbed than ever in a monkey dance performed in the courtyard for the benefit of the children, who stood naked by an exposed section of the balcony, and the rigidity of the purdah system made the elder members peep from behind curtains, Maki, who had been in her bath when the performance began, was rather glad to find, on

re-entering her room, that it was happily deserted. She availed herself of the opportunity for practising a few dance steps and wriggles that the slippery bathroom floor had denied her. She hummed as she moved and was more than surprised at her own agility. She regarded it as distinct talent. She approached the glass and twisted her mouth and brows into the artificial grin she had seen the dancing girl adopt on the night of her wedding, and which she had observed other dancing girls adopt since, for her father-in-law was frequently bringing up nautch girls from town to divert his country seclusion.

Maki's distraction prevented her from hearing the continuous "tock-a-tock" of the monkey man's drum, and his sing-song monologue to his monkeys. She lifted the edge of her *sari* from off her ankles to observe her steps the better, and tripped gaily towards her mirror and from it. It was a little looking-glass that had stood on her dressing-table and she set it on the floor to watch her feet moving. Becoming enthusiastic, she even raised her voice to a point just above a whisper and sang as the nautch

girls sing, of love and laughter, and waved her dainty arms in graceful actions, and pouted her pretty mouth into a shape that was sensuous.

A little nephew by marriage, anxious to share his joy in the monkey dance with all and sundry, having grinned up into the face of every member of the family present on the balcony, became suddenly subconsciously aware that one of their number was missing, and ran into Maki's room, his little naked feet making hardly any patter. He observed the girl with the mirror on the floor, moving her toes awkwardly. He stopped of a sudden, and overcome by surprise inserted a forefinger between his lips as if it was the wisest thing to do under the circumstances. Then, smitten by a bright thought, he withdrew the finger, dropped it to his side and ran back to join his family.

Maki was in the middle of a pirouette when the others, the child in the van, reflected their feet in her little mirror. She went as white as her brown skin would let her. She turned to look at them, her head half drooping as if conscious that she had committed a great wrong. Her step-grand-

mother took her by the ear and led her into her room. This was the first open breach with the leader of her own party. After this, Maki had not a single friend in the harem left her. Some there were—and these the older—who were sorry for her; but one and all regarded her as out of her mind completely. The Rajah was informed and he came up to see her. Maki merely hung her head. What had she to say to him? Her husband, characterless as he was, rather than standing by her, seemed to be afraid of her. He feared she might murder him in her madness; the passion aroused in him by her beauty was not enough to stay his fear of her. He refused to come near her. So, in fact, did most of the family. Maki was placed in a room by herself, behind strictly barred doors. She was the object of gibes and laughter from the youngsters who put their mouths to the meeting point of her barred door and hissed through it, "*Pugli! Pugli!*"¹ Nor could they always be stopped by their grandmother. "*Pugli.*" How that word cut to the quick! How deeply it wounded her! Was she mad?

¹ Mad-woman.

Maki felt she must be. She was so different from the others. The others had not been secluded. Maki had little doubt that she was mad. But why mad? Merely because she did a little singing and dancing. The nautch girls also sang and danced. But that was for the amusement of others. It must undoubtedly be madness to indulge in these things for one's own diversion.

Thoughts of this kind filled Maki's every waking hour for days together. She no longer cared for singing and dancing. They had ceased to become a pleasure once they had become a means to a form of torture. Maki was devoid of hope, devoid of happiness. What had she to look to now? She was married. Before that stage every one seemed to talk to her of that coming condition as of a time of happiness. And now? She was denied her childhood pleasures of hearing the trams clang, the motors toot, the flute-player give vent to the melodies pent up in his bamboo reed. She was denied the joys and sights that till recently meant the be-all and end-all of her existence. How happy had she been, how contented, in that little by-lane at the back of Harrison Road,

within sound of everything that happened, when Nishi was the go-between between Maki and the outer world, bringing her all the news, answering all her questions. And now? The four walls, a bed and the children's jeering. Twice a day formal visits and inquiries from the old lady to whom Maki had till recently been allied; in the evenings, as formal visits from the Rajah who merely nodded his head as he gazed upon her for some moments whilst digesting his dinner.

Maki had pondered on her madness so deeply that she was well on the way to losing her mind actually.

VII

THE Rajah amused himself in his home by making his voice ring through its portals. Most wealthy Indians seem to do this. He inquired into the family affairs of his servants, just to talk about something, gave them all lectures on thrift and economy, and promptly placed orders for some immense expenditure on his own part. He was of an unsettled disposition. Always wanting to do something that he was not actually doing, always returning to do something he had already done. Sometimes he walked round his garden and criticized the work of the *malis*. He would make them clip a little here off a bush, pull out in another place a flower that he thought dead, and give them lessons in the true art of gardening, just to show that he knew all about the subject.

“Why is that plant drooping? Had you done your work properly you would have propped it up with a stick. You ought to know that growing things, like growing children, need sticks.”

There was a murmur of approving laughter from the secretary, cashier and other hangers-on who made it a point of dogging the Rajah's footsteps. The Rajah was pleased with his jest.

“Is that not so? When a thing is growing it must have the stick. How else can it grow straight? So when children are growing we give them the stick so that they will grow up straight, like this plant here.”

His listeners nodded their heads gravely. From a jest the statement had taken the form of philosophy.

“Is that not so?” he asked, turning to his secretary, whom he considered the wisest of his followers.

The secretary joined the palms of his two hands together and bowed his head to them.

“Quite so, my master,” he said reverently.

The Rajah was not yet prepared to dismiss

the subject. Tickled with the thought of the excellent joke he had propounded, he laughed loudly, tossing his chin into the air.

"You must beat them to make them grow." He laughed again. Then straightening his features. "No, not 'beat.' them. If you beat a plant it will not grow. 'Give them a stick.' Ha ha ha." He laughed again.

The secretary, cashier, and attendants also joined in the laughter.

The *mali* came and flung his bare form in the path of the Rajah.

"And what is wrong with you?" asked the Rajah.

The man joined his hands together in an attitude of prayer and whimpered :

"I am ill, my master. I pray for leave to return to my country."

"Ill, are you? You so fat and healthy."

The man was in reality thin and withered. He did not reply but continued his beseeching by his actions.

"Ill and drooping, like your flowers. You do not do your work properly. Else the flowers would not be drooping." Then with

a happy idea. "When plants droop what do you? Give them the stick? Then if I give you the stick you will be all right. Shall I give you the stick?"

The man smiled a sick smile.

"You are my lord and master, my father and mother. If you beat me, who am I to say nay?"

"Shall I beat him?" asked the Rajah of his secretary. Then more thoughtfully, "No, no, not beat him. Give him a stick. I will give him a stick and he may walk with it if he likes."

This was a new joke and the others laughed in approbation. The Rajah enjoyed this more than his other.

"Eh?" he said. "I will give you a stick to walk with. Boy, bearer. Some one go in and bring me a stick to give this man to walk with."

Two men ran indoors to comply with this behest. The Rajah laughed again raising his chin to heaven.

"Eh?" he said. "A stick to walk with?"

The *mali* humbled himself more than ever before his master.

One of the two men came back with a thick stick, while the other panted in the rear.

"Never mind," said the Rajah to the man who held out the stick to him. He did not even turn round to look at him.

"And where is your country?"

The man came from Orissa. His family history was gone into. He was asked if he had another wife with him whilst in his present employment. The man got his leave and was told to return as soon as he was better.

The Rajah proceeded next to the stables. He prodded the sides of his horses with the tip of his stick and announced that he did not think them well fed. He asked the opinion of his secretary. The secretary said he thought the horses looked fat, but they certainly ought to look fatter. This as a concession to his master.

"Much fatter," said the Rajah. "Oh, yes, they could be much fatter. Could be? They should be. What are the syces doing with the gram I pay for?"

A lesson forthwith was read the syces on the art of grooming. Their family histories

were next discussed, and the Rajah passed on to the cow-sheds, where a similar procedure was indulged in.

If the Rajah fancied something that he thought he would like to purchase, he told his secretary to write to a big commercial firm in Calcutta to send up a traveller with samples. These travellers were constantly coming and were housed in a spare bungalow, the property of the Rajah, situated some miles from what he chose to call his "Palace"—the place he lived in. Travellers were often kept waiting many days, sent for and not seen because some other whim had captured the Rajah's fancy between the hour of sending and the man's arrival, or the lure of the harem had drawn him into that quarter.

Some of the commercial travellers were Indians, at times Europeans came too. To-day the Rajah fancied some more jewellery for his own adornment, and he got his secretary to write to a Rai Sahib who kept a jeweller's shop in Calcutta. In a little while the whim had gone, the very desire was forgotten. But the secretary knew too well the consequences if he did not write the letter. The

whim might return, and the Rajah ask for the traveller's arrival. His predecessor, the secretary remembered, had been dismissed for such an omission.

So the Rai Sahib was written to and in a few days a European traveller arrived at Sonarpuri Station, with his servants and his boxes of jewellery. A lakh of rupees worth of articles were packed up in unimposing tin trunks such as Indians use, in order not to attract attention. The jewels travelled as the servants' baggage, and the sahib bore a revolver in his hip pocket for personal safety.

Servants and master waited on the platform with their luggage, but there was no messenger to meet them from the palace. After a while they hired a tumble-down conveyance, the only one available at the station, and set out in quest of the secretary.

Sahib and servants waited six hours before they were as much as noticed. At least the sahib waited, for the servants mingled with the servants of the household; but the sahib had no one with whom he might mingle.

Tired, exceedingly hungry, and exhausted

by the intense heat and an unsatiated thirst, the traveller was on the verge of departing a dozen times, but each time a passing servant announced that the secretary would be there in a moment. The only hope that had sustained him throughout was that he might get his business over early, and save an equal wait at a future date. In this he was extremely inexperienced. He did not know that it is the prerogative of the moneyed Indian to keep his less wealthy fellows waiting—waiting in unattended agonies for hours. But if a guest is moneyed, if, that is to say, the reputation of his wealth has preceded him, there is not too much the host can do for him. He will be waiting at the foot of the stairs, with arms extended; nay, he will go to the very house of his guest to escort him. The commercial traveller had neither money nor the reputation that the possession of it awards. He waited, devoid of food, the means of appeasing his thirst, without a dozen amenities that humanity might have provided. At length the secretary moved his bulky form round the corner. He was sleek and fresh, had soft dreamy eyes that looked ridiculous amid his fat

features, and he smiled unbecomingly, showing red lips stained by the eternally chewed *pan*.

"Have you had a good journey?" Not a word of apology for keeping him waiting.

"A good journey, but a damnable wait here. Where's the Babu? Let's get this over."

"You are talking of the Rajah I presume?"

"Well, the Rajah, if you like," snapped back the traveller.

"He is now sleeping, and cannot be disturbed. You will have to come again. Unless you care to wait till he wakes up."

The traveller's first impulse was to strike the secretary. Then he checked himself. He knew that moneyed Indians bought jewels lavishly. It was one of their methods of hoarding money, since banking is understood but little. His commission, though trifling when considered in the percentage, could very easily run into thousands of rupees in the total, if this Rajah bought jewels as Rajahs are reputed to buy them. He bowed.

"No. I pray you excuse me. I will not

wait. When His Highness wakes it would hardly be fair to bother him with this little business. I think I had better come again another time."

In India only ruling Princes are addressed as "His Highness"; but the traveller thought it better to give a prospective customer the benefit of the doubt.

"Just as you please," said the secretary. "When Rajah sahib will awake, he will bath and take his food and then most probably he will go upstairs to the ladies."

The traveller went home.

The following morning the palace coach and pair, it was announced, had been especially sent in order to conduct the traveller to the Rajah.

The traveller went.

The palace coach was an affair of ruin with a wobbly gait and seats that were constructed of more patchwork than leather. In parts they were frayed, as if to lend them beauty. The exterior of the coach was painted a vivid green, with pink lines at intervals. The inside, where it was not black with the rubbing of shoulders, was a faded yellow. The pair—a more disconcerted pair can hardly be

imagined. One was a black and white and the other almost all white, and each had futuristic spots in pink and yellow painted upon it. They hung their heads as if with shame; but actually because they were weighted down by innumerable bells that swung from the bridle with a ceaseless jingle that made conversation in their vicinity almost impossible. When the coach was in motion the jingling of the bells was like a large city ushering in the New Year from all its churches, only not a fraction as harmonious. The squeaking, creaking, growling, thudding of the old coach added to the general confusion, so that even if there was traffic in the streets of Sonarpuri, which there was not, no additional warning from the driver would have been required to clear a dozen thoroughfares round about the route in which the coach was passing. Yet the coach was fitted with the usual foot bell, and the driver, a stout bearded fellow who sat frog-wise with his heels supporting his portly frame, clanged this additional instrument of aureal torture. The coach proceeded with the traveller to the palace like a complete jazz band in motion. It attracted a good deal of atten-

tion in the streets of the village. But not because of the din it created. It was the palace coach, and, moreover, carriages are scarce in Senarpuri.

The drive to the palace was one of two miles, or a little over. Again the traveller had a wait, and did not in the end see the Rajah. He got away with a few hours to his advantage compared with his previous visit, and was assured he would be sent for when again the Rajah asked for him. Seventeen times the man was sent for in the course of twenty-three days, and each time he failed to see the Rajah, because the whim that had ordered the pair out of the royal stables declined ere the pair bore back an expectant salesman to the palace. When at length Maywell did sell some jewels to the Rajah he had earned, he considered, his commission, in an exceedingly arduous and far from interesting manner.

He had waited for the seventeenth time and had gone home for a late luncheon at four in the afternoon. That meal was scarcely over when the palace coach was brought back by two other horses, and a messenger told Maywell that the Rajah was now

in his garden and that if he came instantly there was just a chance of meeting His Highness.

Maywell went. When he arrived, His Highness was driving round his front garden in a tum-tum drawn by three horses; cracking his whip and exclaiming just as he had heard *ghari* drivers exclaim in Calcutta. This was one of the Rajah's many eccentric modes of diversion. Maywell took advantage of this by speedily spreading his wares on the billiard table, from off the surface of which he had first to clear its many encumbrances.

The Rajah, when he tired of driving round his garden, came into the room adjoining the billiard-room, in which a vast mattress was spread upon the floor like a carpet, and upon this large round pillows were strewn. This was the general sitting-room for Indians. The Indians would take off their shoes, fold their legs under them, the one over the other, like arms, and get hold of their socks with their hands, as if this were the height of social politeness. The body is rocked backwards and forwards in a drowsy motion, and if nothing more takes place than merely *pan*

chewing, the guests will consider that the evening spent thus has been delightful.

But the Rajah sahib generally had nautch parties to which friends were invited. Away in his country house, in a village upon which the cinema has not yet laid its hands, where theatres are not and the means of entertainment solely those of one's own provision, the Rajah took much delight in watching the sensuous dances of women, through tired sleepy eyes, half closed with wine and opium. In this way most of the social duties in the wealthier Indian families are discharged. Conversation is practically non-existent.

But this evening there was no nautch. A hookah glowed idly by the Rajah's favourite seat; and he paused to help himself to some *pan* before settling down to it, when his secretary mentioned to him *en passant* that there was an interesting display of jewels in the next room if the Rajah sahib cared to see them.

The Rajah made with his hand a questioning gesture.

"The Rai Sahib's traveller has arrived. He has many kinds of things that he has brought from Calcutta."

"What kind of things?" said the Rajah, moving towards the billiard-room.

"Oh, jewels and all sorts."

"Jewels and all sorts." The Rajah entered the room repeating the words mechanically. "Good evening," he said to Maywell, raising his hand half-way to his head in a sort of officer salute. "I hear you have jewels and all sorts."

"Mainly jewels," said Maywell. "In fact, only jewels."

"Only jewels? What sort of jewels?" Unsteadily the Rajah stretched out for a tiara. "What do you call this big stone in the middle?" he asked, pointing to a monster diamond.

"A diamond."

"Shis not a diamond."

"No?"

"Shis a sapphire."

"It's a sapphire then," said Maywell, not anxious to start an argument.

"Is this not a sapphire?" asked the Rajah of his secretary.

"Yes, Rajah sahib; it is," was the reply.

"Then why did you tell me a lie?" asked

the Rajah of Maywell. "Isn't that the way to do business? Telling lies?"

Not having sold anything yet Maywell thought it wiser to keep silence.

"Have you a wife? Tell me," the Rajah went on.

This was impertinence. What was it to the Rajah if Maywell was or was not married.

"I have a wife."

"Ah. He has a wife." The Rajah grinned at his secretary with half-closed eyes.

"Do you think your wife will like you telling lies?"

Maywell was silent. The Rajah repeated his question, shaking his whole figure with every word uttered in order to lend emphasis to what he was saying.

"Do you think his wife will like his telling lies?" The Rajah turned to his secretary.

"I don't think his wife will care. She's a mad-woman."

"How in hell do you know?" said Maywell savagely.

"Your servants told my servants, and they told me," was the calm rejoinder.

"A mad wife!" exclaimed the Rajah

grimly. "Let us buy something because he has a mad wife. I'll have this tara-ra, because you have a mad wife." He gave the tiara to his secretary. "Have you any children?"

Maywell felt that if he spoke he would say something that would probably lead him into difficulties. He was a solitary European in a strange place.

"No children!" said the Rajah. "I'll buy this ring—I like the watch on it. You can see the time on your finger. I'll buy this ring because he has no children."

Maywell had almost forgiven the impertinence. His commission was high already.

"I have three children," he said, pursing up his lips. His remark was by way of showing his friendly disposition.

"Let us buy three things because he has three children," said the Rajah.

Three further selections were made.

"And this pretty pearl necklace, because he has a mad wife. What do you do with your mad wife?"

The Rajah laughed again. And then seriously, "I am sorry you have a mad wife." He was in earnest. He placed a hand on

Maywell's shoulder. "I myself have a mad daughter-in-law," he said, thinking of Maki.

A solemn silence followed. Then the Rajah went on.

"My son was tricked into marrying her. My servants and agents and other people afterwards found out that she had shown signs of madness before her marriage. Do you think her father should have let my son marry her? I shall get even with Toton. I have set my lawyers upon him."

Nobody dared to interrupt the Rajah. Not a word was said when he had done speaking. So he went on:

"Would you have liked to have been tricked into marrying a mad wife. Oh, I forget. You have a mad wife. What have you done with her?"

Maywell no longer regarded the remarks as impertinence. There was a common burden that they shared.

"I? My wife is in an asylum."

"An asylum? What is an asylum?"

"A home for mad people."

"Ah. A home for mad people. Then why should I make my house a home for mad people? Summo"—the Rajah called his

secretary—"turn Maki out of my house immediately."

His hearers were staggered.

"To-night. What! A mad child," said the secretary.

"You can hardly do that, your Highness," interposed Maywell. "It would be a danger to the public, and the Government would not like it."

"Well then, she may stay to-night. But write to Toton, Summo *jee*. Write to Toton and tell him that if he wants back his daughter he can take her; otherwise I shall send her to the 'sylum.'" He turned to Maywell. "Thank you, my friend, for the excellent advice you have given me. A mad person should not be in the house. Quite so. I thank you again heartily. My pair and coach will take you home. I've got a nice coach—beautiful green outside. Summo, my secretary, will show it to you. Also he will pay you. Tell him your account. And Summo, Summo, give him one thousand rupees extra, because of the good advice he has given me."

VIII

MAKI was escorted back to the house of her father, and she returned again to the little latticed room that looked down into the narrow gully in the back regions of Harrison Road. The walls still caught all the haunting sounds of her childhood, and she breathed once more an air of childishness and freedom.

Meanwhile Toton and the Rajah were fighting a duel according to the approved Indian standards—in the law courts. Toton claimed the return of the dowry because of the return of Maki. The Rajah declared, for his part, that since his son had been duped into a foolish marriage that cast a slur upon so noble a family and he could hardly hold his head high now—he held it high to show what he meant—he did not think he was justified in returning the dowry.

Toton retorted that if the Rajah could not hold his head high now he would have to tuck it away under his arm after the whole world had been talking of Maki's madness, as they would be doing once the law reports got into the papers.

To which the Rajah said that Maki was not *his* daughter, and the slur would be all the greater for Toton.

At this point it was left to the lawyers to complete the issue. The sum represented by the dowry was not so small that either party was prepared to ignore it.

The case dragged out its weary way as cases do in India, and in time it dawned upon an austere member of the legal profession that it would do no harm to have Maki's mind examined by a competent medical authority. An English doctor was sent for. Maki screamed when she saw an open mouth, three protruding front teeth, and a handbag enter her bedroom. The doctor examined her minutely. Maki, for whom the remembrance of the exorcism of the devil was a vivid memory for all time, was left in gloom and foreboding when the doctor departed. She did not understand a

word of his diagnosis. Had she known that his parting statement was that he would come again on the morrow, she would have been more terrified than ever. Her new maid was not one in whom she could seek consolation. She was ignorant, young—a child almost; with alarmist, superstitious fears that made her shrink from many things. How she consented to serve Maki, who was believed to be mad, is a mystery. Perhaps she did not know about this alleged madness. She was scared almost to whiteness at the sight of the English doctor, and ran out of the room with her hands to her eyes the instant he had entered.

The doctor pronounced Maki “Not Mad”; but was coming again the next day with another doctor in consultation in order to have a second opinion upon the subject. Maki did not know what was his pronouncement. She felt certain that his visit meant a renewal of a torture she had already once been through connected with the exorcism of the devil; and she was determined not again to face it. She decided she would run away. She was of two minds as to confiding her purpose in her maid, Kishore. She felt that as the

two were of much the same age they would make tolerable runaway companions. Maki had seen enough of Calcutta from the curtained window of her cab, the few times she had passed through it, to know that it was too vast a place for her, alone, to know where to go to. This vastness though would, in itself, be a safeguard against her rediscovery. Yet where was she to go to? Could Kishore be relied upon, or would she reveal the plan to Toton before it was put into execution? Maki did not know a single address in town. Kishore would undoubtedly be a great assistance in this respect: she had, at least, her own address. Yet if both Maki and Kishore were missing together, Kishore's house would be the first place that Toton would visit. Kishore, he would reason, would not take Maki elsewhere: she was too timid, too simple.

Maki was hours deliberating. She took her evening meal in silence, sat in silence through her father's visit and interpreted his look of joy and his unusual affection—born of the pleasure that the assurance his daughter was not mad gave and the return of the dowry that this would entail; or the restora-

tion of Maki to her husband, Toton did not care which—as a kindness to her preceding the torture that was awaiting her. When the hour arrived for retiring Maki had not yet decided what she would do. She thought, perhaps, it would be wiser to sleep upon it. She was much too tired to run away at that moment, besides the servants, who retire at an unusually late hour, were sure to be about and to see her, whether she was alone or with Kishore.

But, tired as she was mentally, sleep would not come, court it how she would. Maki had no idea of time, often times she felt that dawn would soon be coming. She had never been awake through an entire night yet, not even on the night of her marriage, and for some inexplicable reason she dreaded doing so now. She tried to sleep again. . . . And yet if morning dawned it would be too late to escape. . . . And, oh, if the doctor came again!

Maki crept out of her bed that creaked even under her trifling weight. With watchful eyes on Kishore she tiptoed out of the room, deciding in a moment to leave the girl behind her. Gone were instantly all her

doubts and fears of being alone in so vast and unknown a city. She tiptoed down the servants' staircase, an enclosed brick affair. A thousand times she glanced back because she felt she was being followed. But not once did she waver in her determination to go on. Not once on those stairs did she ask herself, "Shall I go on or go back? Am I doing the right thing?"

The horror of the torture drove her onward. She felt the chill morning air on her unshod feet, and she felt it blow up her legs from under her *sari*. She pulled the part of that garment that covered her head over her face till it shielded her eyes, and with lowered head paced down the gully. She had not been followed. She had gained a wonderful liberty. The gully led into a street that entered, on the side into which Maki had turned almost automatically, into Chitpore Road, within sight of the great thoroughfare of Harrison Road, known as Burra Bazaar to the Indians. Maki had not yet been observed. Dozens of male forms were strewn about the street like dead beings. Here and there one or two snored, some coughed, many stirred, one even sat up

and spat; but none saw her, or if they did, none observed her.

Maki wended her way into Harrison Road almost as if she remembered the route the *ghari* had taken from her father's house to the station. Harrison Road was not so dead. A pariah dog was sniffing some refuse. In the grey distance a man sat on the edge of the pavement. On the opposite side a body of women, the brass *lotas* that swung with their hands reflecting the light of the dying street lamps, sang a lamenting ditty as they walked on. Maki crossed the street and merged herself into this party. The women sang with their heads bowed and for some time did not see Maki. When they did they were already by the river, where the party had gone for the usual morning ablution.

"Have you lost yourself, daughter?" asked an elderly woman, laying a friendly hand on Maki's chin and looking deep into her countenance.

"I have," said Maki feebly.

"Who were you with?" inquired another. All the women had by now gathered round Maki. From a distance they appeared to be a crowd intensely interested in something

and a number of bathers stopped, looked, and began to approach them.

"Who were you with?" The first old woman repeated the question put by the other.

"My father."

"Your father!" There was great concern in the party. How could her father have managed to lose her? Surely——

Maki realised her mistake. She corrected herself instantly.

"No, no; not my father. I have no father." She thought it wisest not to give them the slenderest clue as to who she might be. She felt certain that had she confessed she had a father they would instantly connect her with Toton; as if Toton was the only man in the world that was a father.

"What? No father? But you just said you were with your father," said a number of the women together.

"I was——" began Maki, thoroughly confused.

One or two women laughed. The elderly woman drew back a pace, twitching her lips.

"Did not you just say that you had no father?"

Maki, feeling she was inextricably tied up, resorted to the prerogative her sex exercises on such occasions and burst out crying; the more so because one of the listeners stated as her opinion that Maki must be a mad girl.

They told her to bathe in the river and to call upon Kali to restore her intelligence to her. They each said a prayer for Maki; the Indian is instinctively feeling and neighbourly.

Maki sought comfort in prayer. She took off as much of her clothes as she saw the other women take off—her *curta*¹—and went into the water merely draped in her *sari*. She raised her hands to heaven as the other women did, then drew the *sari* once more over her head and pulled it forward to cover her eyes, and, emerging, walked dripping back with the women to the city.

It was already dawn. The sun blazed maroon above the eastern roofs, where drying garments fluttered in the morning breeze and great kites swooped down at intervals. As she passed, a coarse joke or two was flung at

¹ A sort of vest: women wear this in the evenings and early mornings, when the air is colder.

her by a young man who surveyed her form through the wet clinging garment. Maki's ears tingled but she only drooped her head. The women in the party, who were also wet and dripping, took the compliments for themselves and replied as coarsely. In the streets of Calcutta men and women use the vilest of language in talking to each other.

The women had no intention of taking Maki home with them, the more so as she showed symptoms of madness. It was their opinion that she had been set adrift by her family because of her madness. Had she been a fugitive from her father or bowed down with some grief they would doubtless have been glad to extend to her a hand of friendship. They questioned her further. Did she know of nowhere to go to? Maki in a flash thought of Brhomo. She said at once she was the daughter of Brhomo, who was in service in a theatre. Maki rather liked the idea of being taken to the theatre, even on so slender a chance of finding Brhomo.

"In service in a theatre!" exclaimed the elderly woman. "But what theatre? There are a great many theatres in Calcutta."

"I do not know," said Maki, shaking her innocent childish chin and letting her lashes twinkle prettily.

Already some of the women forgot that Maki was mad, and with the usual Indian generosity they were willing to befriend her. They would have liked to have given her a temporary home, but their own was exceedingly precarious. Each was a town wife of an Ooryah bearer, who had his own wife in his village somewhere in Orissa and had married again temporarily a willing woman in Calcutta. Women of this type generally make friends with one another at a common pump, whither they go each morning and evening with earthenware jars for water, and bear them back with spilling fullness upon their hips, for the requirements of domesticity. In the early mornings they proceed in company to the river, relying on numbers for safety.

Little as were the chances of Maki finding Brhomo—as they thought, her mother—at one of the many theatres in Calcutta, the women were willing to assist her in her quest. One of the party volunteered to accompany Maki, as they could not all go,

and Maki and she proceeded down Chitpore westwards to the Minerva, which was the nearest from where they then were.

Brhomo was, of course, not there. Nobody had even heard of her. The other theatres were a great distance away and as Maki had never walked more than the limits her little room would allow, she was already very tired and not in the least bit disposed to go any further, particularly as she was in no way certain Brhomo was now employed in any theatre. Brhomo had left her without any indication as to where she was going. She never received any letters, she could not read in fact, so there would be nothing to forward. If the other servants in Toton's house had any information about Brhomo, Maki was no longer in a position to avail herself of their help. She did not know that she particularly wanted Brhomo. Only Brhomo would understand her, and Brhomo might put her on to providing for herself in some way. And yet, perhaps, it would be best not to find Brhomo. She might just happen to take it into her silly head to blurt it out to Toton, hoping to earn a reward for the information.

Maki decided to take her guide into her confidence.

"Do not tell anybody," she began timidly in slow hesitating tones. "But I have run away from home."

"*Array ma go! Array bhap re bhap!* Oh, my mother! Oh, my great grandfather!" exclaimed the woman in a loud tone.

Almost instantly a crowd gathered inquiringly around her.

"What has happened?" they demanded. "What is the trouble?" they asked of one another.

"This girl has run away from home," said Maki's guide, as if it were a kindness to the public that they should know about it.

"*Array bhap re bhap!*" exclaimed the crowd with almost one, rather straggling, voice.

"Take her to the police," said a tall young man with wavy hair. Then coming nearer, and noticing that Maki was beautiful, "Or let her come with me, my mother will be glad to keep her."

"Your mother," jeered a wag. "Horses' eggs!¹ You never had a mother."

¹ The Indian equivalent for "a mare's nest."

Words were bandied and a fight almost followed, though an Indian if he can help it avoids coming to blows at all times. They are always on the verge of striking, and will wave umbrellas for hours at each other without letting the weapons descend on their opponents. The crowd, which had swelled to great proportions by this time, was divided in listening to the verbal dispute between the tall man with the wavy hair and the wag, and proffering advice as to what should be done with Maki. A policeman, who felt it was no business of his to interfere in any gathering, glanced up once from a distance, and made the most of his opportunities for thrusting his attentions on a woman selling *pan* on the pavement whom he had admired distantly ever since he had come on that beat four days previously. The *pan wali* was in no mood to miss what was happening, so that as soon as she had collected her wares together she folded them in her garment and beckoned to the policeman to come along with her and see what the crowd was absorbed in.

The policeman regarded it as an excellent opportunity for displaying his authority in

order to impress the *pan wali* with his importance.

"What are you doing there?" he called in terrifying accents.

The crowd began to fray at the edges.

"Come along," yelled the man with the wavy hair to Maki, in defiance of the wag's remarks. "Come along and I will show you whether I have got a mother."

"Don't let him take me," sobbed Maki. Her guide, who was not in the least bit evilly disposed towards Maki even though she had run away from her father, and who had only exclaimed through the shock of the statement, and had repeated it to the crowd almost thoughtlessly, assured Maki she would not let the man touch her.

"Let me come with you. Can't you keep me for one day?" Maki looked pleadingly up into her guide's face. The woman reflected an instant. She thought of her husband, the fragility of a marriage such as she had contracted, and how easy it might be for Maki's beauty to deprive her of her own conjugal advantages.

"No," she said. "Forgive me. I cannot keep you."

The policeman had come up by this time.

"What's all this trouble?" he asked savagely.

"No trouble, brother. We're only talking." An elderly toothless man volunteered the information.

"Talking? About what were you talking?"

"This little girl here," lisped the toothless.

"What has she done?"

There was a momentary silence.

"She ran away from her home," yelled a boy of ten who stood on the outskirts of the crowd. He showed a savage delight, and was already preparing to run, for he realized that the crowd might resent his giving information that would lead another into trouble. Indians are ever ready to shield one another.

"Liar! What an outrageous liar!" said everybody in the crowd together.

"Tell me the truth then. What's all this? Who are you, woman? And who is this girl with you?" The policeman took some *pan* out of a small tin snuff box and inserted it into his mouth with thumb and forefinger till his cheek bulged on one side.

"This girl," lied Maki's guide, "is my daughter."

Maki was too terrified even to display her joy at this statement.

"Then why are you causing such a disturbance?"

"I'm only going home quietly."

"She's only going home quietly, *babu*. Yes, yes, she's only going home quietly," members of the crowd assured the policeman.

"Then go along," said the policeman, throwing his hand forward.

He turned and beamed on the *pan wali*, obviously satisfied that he had done his duty.

IX

DAWN in the house of Toton was ushered in by a series of shrieks from Kishore. Maki was missing, and the ignorant girl felt intuitively that she might be held responsible for the loss. She, too, determined on flight, and while putting her things together she gave vent to repeated shrieks, to satisfy her conscience, as it were. In a little while Toton was beside her, and the other male servants stood in a cluster at the head of the stairs, not daring to enter the female quarter.

"She's gone. Maki has gone away. I cannot find her."

Toton did not understand.

"What do you mean 'She's gone.'"

"Oh, my master, what a terrible thing. Maki has gone away, I cannot find her. And I'm going away too. I will not work here

any longer." As if there would be need for Kishore to stay once Maki was not there.

"Cannot find her. Have you looked in the bath-room?"

"I have looked everywhere. Maki is not in this house." Kishore sat down on her bundle and began to cry.

Toton gripped her by the throat and raised her to her feet.

"Don't be a fool, woman. Get up and search for her. Look under the bed." Toton bent his rotund form and looked for himself. "Look in the cupboard. She may be hiding."

Kishore sank back on her bundle and set up a louder howl than ever.

"She is not in this house I tell you, sir. Not in this house. I have searched everywhere."

On the stairs the other servants whispered to each other. "What has happened? What has happened? Maki has run away? Oh." They scuttled down the stairs again. They knew Toton's was a blind fury. Those nearest generally got the brunt of it.

Toton could not yet realise that Maki was missing. The shock of the occurrence had

possibly dulled his sense of comprehension. He shook Kishore again to her feet, but the girl only sank back on to her bundle as soon as Toton had released her shoulders. She was weeping and wailing now louder than ever. Toton's first impulse was to slap her. He then thought it better to search for Maki himself without further loss of time.

He felt certain Maki was hiding.

He approached the almirah, and placed his hand on the handle.

"Maki!" he called half laughingly. "Maki, come out of that. I know your little games." He turned the handle and drew the door open. "Maki." There was a note of alarm in his voice. Then with accents of despair. "Oh my Maki, Maki. Where have you got to?"

Toton struck his head as if in penance; and then sank on Maki's bed and sobbed like a child. Almost every Indian is a child at heart.

Kishore, seizing her opportunity, lifted her bundle softly and began to creep away. But the sudden cessation of Kishore's wailing drew Toton's attention to her. He looked up, saw her making for the door, sprang from

the bed like a savage animal and held his arm out to seize her.

But Kishore was too lithe, too nimble. Toton's bulky gait was a handicap. She evaded his grip and was on the stairs, tripping away almost light-heartedly down them.

Toton ran to the balcony, and called down into the courtyard five floors below :

"Stop her, all you dogs. Stop that woman. If she runs away I will hand you all to the police."

There was a stir in the yard below. Every servant believed that a dire punishment was awaiting him at the hands of the law if he failed to display obedience to his master. The name of the police is often used as an effective threat to the Indian of the serving order.

"Go to those stairs, you swine, you dogs, you low casted fools. Those stairs there, look. Kishore is getting away."

The mention of the name of Kishore made the servants realize what Toton intended. Kishore emerged from the doorway at the foot of the stairs, ran into and out again of the arms of a servant who had been waiting to catch her.

"Bar the front door," yelled Toton from above. "Bar all the doors. Don't let this she-dog get away. I will show her what I will do to her."

The *durwan* barred the front door just as Kishore had got to it, after running in and out of the arms of almost all the servants in the establishment. The servants only made a show of seizing her. They did not like laying hands on a woman. Besides they were alarmed as to what Toton might do to her in his fury. Yet they dared not let her get away lest the same fury descend upon themselves.

The *durwan* brushed her aside and barred the door. Toton had uttered terrible threats as he saw Kishore approach it. Kishore fell on her knees before the *durwan* and kissed his dust covered feet.

"Let me out, let me out, my master. And Heaven will reward you. Oh, let me out; oh, let me out." She kissed his feet frantically.

The *durwan* was touched, but with Toton's eyes upon him he dared not do anything to help her. Toton still stood on the balcony above, looking down upon the scene below, and glancing back over his shoulder at intervals confidently expecting to see Maki

flitting again from room to room. He missed the musical tinkle of her bangles, her beautiful, soft accents, her pretty laugh. There was an unholy stillness upon the place.

"Bring her to me," Toton called to the servants below.

"Go along. Go to the malik," they ordered Kishore.

Kishore made one more attempt to appeal to the *durwan*. But, much as he would have liked to have helped her, he remained adamant. Kishore ran back into the yard, mounted the brim of the fountain, and flung herself into it. She was dragged out before the water could overwhelm her, but she was badly bruised, on shoulder and head, by the central architecture of the fountain.

Toton, under the circumstances, contented himself with muttering curses. He allowed the servants to take Kishore away to her godown and warned them that they were at no time to leave the gate open. That night Kishore soaked her *sari* in kerosene oil that she emptied on herself from her little tin burner, set fire to her clothes and was burnt to death. The servants felt the heat and saw the blaze. They pushed open her door, but

seeing her burning were too afraid to go near her. And Kishore died and was cremated at one and the same time, and the *durwan*, in expiation of his sin for not giving her her freedom, collected her ashes in a cup and dropped them into the holy river. He also fasted an entire day. He felt he was somehow responsible for her death.

Once fully conscious of the fact that Maki was actually missing, Toton was completely at a loss as to how he should find her. He informed the police, but they were not in a position to help him. Toton had no photograph to give them. He could supply them with no description except that she was a girl of seventeen. How could they search for a girl of seventeen in all India, amongst its three hundred million and more inhabitants? The girl would be completely swallowed up in the multitude. Those whom she was with, if they knew she was a refugee from her father, or even from the law, would not surrender her to her punishment. They would say she was their own child. No statistics are kept as to how many there are here to-day, and how many there were yesterday. No figures as to who has come into the house afresh.

The immediate neighbours gossip, but their voices are hushed at the sight of the red police uniform.

Toton felt the chances of finding Maki were very slender. There are no residential Indian hotels at which he might inquire, no residential hotels for Indians, not even in so large a city as Calcutta, which in population can compare with some of the biggest in Europe. There are pilgrim rest-houses, and waiting-rooms at the railway stations where people without homes rest. But there are many without even a hut to keep their clothes in, who wander about the town buying food or begging it, and sleep on the streets or in the *maidans*.¹ How can one tell which among these thousands is a new face? Most of them are at different times at different ends of the city. Men die at street corners and are taken away to the river side to be burnt without anything being known about them. Those who see a man lying dead, ask of one another: "Who was this man? Where did he come from?" and they say "He looks to us like a coolie, or a beggar, or a menial who has been many days without occupation.

¹ Parks.

Look how thin he is.” They point to his ribs that show at the sides as they do in an Indian umbrella. The authorities have the body taken away, sometimes holding it aloft on a high pole so that all may see it and identify it. They keep it in the *ghat* for seven days, in case relatives come to ask for missing brothers or husbands or fathers. Then they send the body to the *morgue*, where Indian medical students rip it up in the course of their research work.

Toton did not forget the burning *ghat*. It is a sort of Scotland Yard for lost human articles—after they are dead. Toton felt Maki might commit suicide or die of starvation. He gave the fat Bengali clerk in charge at the *ghat*, a man who filled in forms in English in connection with every body burnt, a ten-rupee note and his address, and asked him to inform him of any Indian girl found, a girl of about seventeen. “Or any Indian girl,” said Toton. He felt the Bengali may not have a just estimation as to what one’s age might be.

A servant from Toton’s house called every day at this *ghat*, twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, to ask if the body of

any girls were found. There were only bodies of men found, generally old men. Infrequently old women. Once Toton went along to examine the corpse of an old woman, fearing that Maki might have aged in the few days she had been away from him, or that the servant had not understood the Bengali correctly. But it was not the form of Maki. At another time the body of a girl was found. She might have been sixteen, she might have been twenty. Her face was so badly disfigured one could not recognize it. Toton feared it might be Maki, but a lean old man came and claimed it as his wife. She had left his home he said after a very trifling quarrel. He told them all about the quarrel, and asked them to say if he was or was not in the right. He did not know how she had killed herself. But her face was badly damaged. "Ah, ha, ha ha, poor foolish girl," he said pityingly. "See there the big mole on her left shoulder, that is how I have recognized her."

X

MAKI'S guide and protector led her away from the crowd, away from the police. When they were alone together in a by-lane the old problem as to what she should do with her rose again to confront her. Of one thing she was certain—she could not take the girl home. She did not even know of anyone who wanted to employ her.

At this moment the tall youth with the wavy hair, whose attraction for Maki was obvious, and who had followed Maki and her guide down the side street, was a few paces behind them, and called out to them to hear him.

"Ho, girl!" he said. "Do you want an occupation?"

"She wants to have nothing to do with you," was the rejoinder from Maki's benefactor.

"No, joking aside," went on the tall youth.

"I know of just such an occupation to suit her. At the house where I am working, they are looking for an ayah. Let the girl get the position now. I heard the master tell the other female servants that he wanted an ayah."

"Where is this place of which you talk?"

"Here, only just here. One minute from here."

It proved to be actually twenty odd minutes away, down a number of side streets that only bewildered Maki. She wondered how anybody could ever know their way about through them.

The tall youth approached one of the women servants of the house, called her familiarly by her name, and declared that he had brought his sister to work there.

"And this is my mother," he said, pointing to Maki's companion, who was not quite old enough to be his mother; yet motherhood is an honour and amongst Indians, girls become mothers when they are little more than children.

The woman did not dispute his statement. The enhancement of her age that his remark entailed left her unaffected.

Maki got the situation. She was to receive eight rupees a month, and could live with the other women. Her guide secured a promise that she should receive half the first month's wages in return for having agreed to be Maki's mother. Then she left Maki.

Maki found it strange to be in service. She tried to recall all that Kishore, and Brhomo and poor old Nishi had had to do for her, and she flattered herself that she was in the enviable position in which they once were. She could go out into the world, while those in the zenana that she served were pent up within four walls. Her position had been completely reversed. From being born to be served she was now serving. She had attained what she had long desired. She could do what her servants did, go out into the outer world and enjoy liberty. It was absurd to think that because she was not born to it she could not do it. Yet Maki could not help the misgiving that she was doing a wrong thing. Her servants had respected her and said that in her caste women could not show their faces to strange men. And everybody had seen her, her husband of course, the youth with the wavy hair, the Sikh

servant in her father's country home into whose arms she had descended naked. But what did it matter? Maki, like all Indians, was a fatalist. What the stars had shown had to be. The stars had willed that she should run away from home, that she should bare her gaze to the men. She was after all only following the will of Heaven.

The lad with the wavy hair lost no time in explaining to the other servants that Maki was not actually his sister, but his stepsister, or rather she was the daughter of the woman who was now married to his father; that Maki and he had been brought up together since childhood, and that he had since married her. He prepared accordingly to receive Maki in his own godown. Maki did not understand any sense of wrong in this, and when the lad told her that as she was his sister she would have to sleep with him, Maki went in without demur. What did she know what brother and sister did or did not do. She never had a brother.

Maki and the youth lived together, and when the lad was out of sight, the other men servants about the house made advances to her; for Maki was indeed very beautiful.

They made it a point of offering her little dainties that they bought for her, such as sweets, and trinkets; and one went so far as to buy her a *sari*. The youth suspected nothing. Maki received a salary and could buy herself things if she wanted to. But the wives of the other men were very jealous and lost no time in poisoning the youth's mind against Maki. They said Maki used to go out with the other men, that she had been out only that afternoon with the *mali*. Not that Maki would not have gone out with the other men had she been asked to. Maki knew no better. But things had not quite advanced so far. The others had not thought it worth while yet to ask her to come out with them, as the youth was always at home when they were most free.

But the youth chose to believe what he heard of Maki. That night he beat her by way of a warning, and swore he would beat her to death if he heard anything more about her. Maki did not know what he had heard. She was too frightened to inquire. The youth went outside and proclaimed curses on all the servants. He threatened the *mali* that he would burn his hut over his head if he as

much as spoke to Maki. He said he had heard everything about them. That man who like the others had also nursed a secret passion for Maki, but had never had more courage than to stare at her fondly from a distance, had often been chided by his wife, for she detected affection in his gaze. So when the youth upbraided him the man's first thoughts went to his wife. He felt that she had had a hand in this mischief, by way of curing him of his amorous glances. So after a squabble with the youth which nearly led to a fight with sticks, the *mali* went into his room to give his wife a beating. There was wailing in his home till morning. He had seven children, the eldest but seven, and still a baby in disposition, and they all kept their mother company in her sobbing. After a troubled night without sleep, the *mali* in the morning decided to elope with Maki.

Maki's mind was well prepared to entertain his suggestion by her own sorrows and the ill-treatment of the youth with whom she was living. The *mali* told her that he would be waiting for her in a third class *ghari* at the head of the street; and here Maki joined him in the forenoon. She left a comparatively

handsome youth for a hideous, elderly man, with but two large ugly teeth in his head; and that man in turn left his wife with her seven children to shift for themselves as best they might. When night fell and it was realized in their respective homes that neither Maki nor the *mali* would be likely to be returning, a quarrel developed in which was involved almost every one in that building. The mother of seven cursed the youth because his wife, as she put it, had enticed away her husband. The youth was almost savage, and threatened to kill her and her whole family; the woman turned upon all the other women in that service, accusing them of having unnecessarily mixed up her husband's name with Maki's, and having thus put it into their two heads to elope with one another. The women were not disposed to take this quietly. They retaliated with all the accompaniment of vile language that is the *sine qua non* of Indian quarrels; and a shindy as is quite a common occurrence in Indian Calcutta followed. The master and others in the house in time interfered and the affair simmered less noisily in the respective godowns.

The *mali* and Maki drove on to Howrah to wend their way out of Calcutta.

At the station Maki realized where the man was taking her. Her own experiences of the country were far too distressful and she declined to go there. The man had already bought the tickets; besides he had no destination except his little village—or rather to another village close by, in order to avoid meeting the wife he had left in his home there. Maki declined to go firmly. It was surprising how firm she could be, seeing how indolent and flexible her disposition had been in the recent past. Yet firm she was, and when the man attempted to coerce her to enter the compartment, she slapped his face and ran away. The man thereupon held out his two railway tickets for all to behold them; and there were tears in his eyes as he spoke of the obstinacy of women. But his listeners merely laughed and passed on. One or two of them chaffed him for his flightiness in old age.

Maki walked to the front of the station and hailed a *ghari*. She had wrapped away in a corner of her *sari* a rupee or two saved from her earnings. A third class *ghari* driver

whipped up his horses and looked at her doubtfully. Maki was simply dressed. . . . It wasn't quite usual for women to go about singly in *gharis* in Calcutta.

Maki told the man to drive to the theatre. Though she had had her freedom for nearly two months now, she did not know the names of the theatres. But she knew the names of the principal thoroughfares in the Indian quarter.

"Which theatre?" asked the driver.

Maki thought a moment.

"The one in Harrison Road," she hazarded. The principal street she felt was sure to have a theatre. The street has, but much further down than she imagined. The man drove on a little way, the carriage rattling and wobbling over the tram cobble stones. Then he stopped and bent his head down towards the carriage window.

"What are you going to do at the theatre at this hour?" he asked curiously. "It is not yet time for a performance." It was the early afternoon and the driver, who was a theatre frequenter, knew that it was not the day for a matinee.

"Never you mind what I shall do. You

just go there." Maki's brief liberty had already given her a strength of character. She realized what was and what was not impertinence.

"Oho!" exclaimed the driver scornfully. "Quite a ranee, aren't you? Don't you fancy yourself?" Then roughly. "Come on, woman, tell me what you mean to do there at so early an hour, or I shall refuse to take you." He stopped his carriage, and got off the dicky seat. He felt he could talk to a girl in this manner, particularly as she was alone and undefended.

"Go on," said Maki. "Don't be an idiot. What I do is none of your business."

"Isn't it though? How do I know that you can afford to pay me?"

Maki held up to him the corner of her *sari*, through which the rupee showed flat and round.

The driver laughed.

"Only your *pan*. You think you can deceive me."

Maki was about to untie her knot and show him the glisten of the silver. Then she feared he would snatch the money from her. She tucked the knot back into her waist.

"Go on," she said, "and don't talk so much."

"Get out of my carriage," said the driver, laying hands on Maki. "Come on, get out of my carriage."

"Ugh!" grunted Maki. "What is a *ghari* for but to take people? I'll call the police if you don't go." She tried the police dodge, hoping it would prove effective.

"Call the police," said the driver. "I can refuse to carry a bad woman if I choose to."

Meanwhile the usual interested crowd had gathered. Maki, fearing to create a scene, now that there wasn't anybody with her to help her out of any difficulties that might develop, tried calmer tactics.

"Come now," she smiled. "Will you take me if I tell you what I am going for."

The smile was very becoming. But the driver was not to be won over so easily. Being cross, he did not at once notice the beauty that beamed from those twinkling eyelids.

"You pay me first, else I will not take you."

"How much?" asked Maki, wishing now more than ever to avoid a sensation.

"Ten rupees," demanded the driver, asking a fare a dozen times in excess of his due.

Maki was quite alarmed.

"I've only got two rupees," she said quietly. She looked beautiful even in her confusion.

"Give me what you have then, and I'll take you."

Maki undid the knot and handed him the money.

"Get away, you dogs," said the driver to the crowd around. "Get away and make room for me."

"What has happened?" queried a policeman coming up.

"The reins had snapped and I was mending them," lied the driver.

The policeman dispersed the crowd with fierce oaths, and the *ghari* rattled onward.

Arrived at the theatre the driver dismounted and affably asked Maki whom he should call for.

Maki, grown quite timid through her recent experience, said she was looking for employment.

"Oh," said the driver, raising his brows, "then you had better see the proprietor."

He smiled affectionately at Maki. It was every desire of his now to please her.

The proprietor of the theatre was not there. A number of the members of the theatre staff, scene shifters, box office babus, and even sweepers came forward to gaze at Maki. They told the driver where the proprietor lived and he very kindly offered to drive Maki there, without further payment.

"I'll show you," said a boy, springing on to the box beside the driver. He was glad of the free drive this would give him; and the carriage rolled on.

Maki was engaged for the theatre. The proprietor came back instantly with her. He engaged a room for her to live in, said he would pay for her keep entirely, and call that evening to see if she was comfortable.

Maki lived in princely style compared to what she had been used to recently. The women around her—there were only women in the building in which a room for her had been taken—were most friendly in their attitude; and they all had heaps of men visitors. The evenings were usually enlivened

with song and music, and the theatre proprietor brought sweet red liquid to drink which made Maki so sleepy, so happy.

XI

AS the months went by and Maki did not return, for neither had the police succeeded in finding any clue as to her whereabouts nor had the Babu at the burning *ghat* found an unclaimed body answering her description, Toton grew very concerned. He resolved that it was time for serious penance.

Accordingly he shaved his head, and all the hair from his face, until he looked like an unrecognizable object, and donning the saffron of holy men proceeded on a pilgrimage. He stretched his fat form, bare except for a scanty loin-cloth, before his door, marked on the dust with his finger-tips the spot they touched when his arms were extended at full length, then rose and tipped with his feet this new line. Lying again at full length and marking off once more with his

finger-tips a new line for his toes to foot, he proceeded onwards. Thus he went to the temple of Kali, a distance of more than four miles from his domicile. He traversed streets busy with traffic, but the traffic either held up or went round him. Even in the European quarter it is realized that the Indian has several curious semi-religious or wholly religious customs; and they are respected.

At the end of ten days, resting only at intervals and eating merely what scraps of food were given him, Toton arrived at the temple of Kali, in the district of Kalighat, to which it gives its name. He was a changed Toton, looking thin and gawky, and almost comical with his shaved head and face, which had been bereft even of eyebrows. He vowed great vows at the Temple, promising himself fresh tortures if only Kali would restore his daughter. Kali is a cruel goddess: nothing appeases her so much as the self-inflicted torture of her votaries. Sometimes not even that. But there are thousands that are hopeful, as all can see who visit Kalighat in season, when instruments comparable to the worst conceived by the Spanish Inquisition are there and adopted freely by the repenters.

Old bearded men sit naked on a board of nails until their flesh bleeds and everything is red around. The goddess seems to love nakedness; there are many naked figures designed within the Temple.

Toton came back to his home and went his rounds again to the European commercial houses as if nothing had happened. The men stared at him and for a time did not recognize him. Then they laughed and asked :

“Well, Toton Babu. What has happened? Have you been taking part in a pantomime?”

But for Toton it was no laughing matter. His answer was given in all seriousness :

“My daughter is dead, and I am in mourning.”

Maki was as good as dead to him. Besides, what good was it telling family affairs to outsiders.

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The proprietor of the theatre who had provided a home for Maki was an enormously stout man with a series of double chins that seemed to descend down to his waist-line.

When the nights were hot he would pull his linen shirt off over his head and lay it aside in a corner. Then the impression that his chins merged into his waist was considerably strengthened. The enormous round face was clean shaven, but upon the chest grew a quantity of black curly hair. At a glance, through half closed eyes, it seemed as if this was his beard, growing approximately in the region where the double chins ended. The man's name was Akhil Chunder Mukerjee, and he belonged to one of the holy families of Bengal, with whom the name of Mukerjee, and all the other "jees," excepting the Parsee patrynomics, are inseparably associated.

Mukerjee was an amusing companion to be with. About a third of his humour was intentional. The rest of the time he made you laugh because he could not help it. His very laugh was funny. It consisted of a series of snorts and snores and a considerable shaking of his frontage. When he laughed he was absolutely helpless. His face wreathed with smiles, quiet giggles used to gurgle at the corners of his mouth, and many were the times he would hold up his hand and essay to open his mouth as if he

would add still another jest, but his lips used to move soundlessly and then surrender to the giggles. If Mukerjee never said or did anything that was productive of laughter, his laugh alone would have convulsed onlookers.

But Mukerjee was fond of good eating, and he made a practice of having a late dinner with Maki. Maki did not know that he came to her after he had already dined with his wife and family; if she had been told it, she would hardly have believed it, such a great quantity did Mukerjee succeed in consuming in her presence. Mukerjee was a colossal eater. He consumed a big repast at home—a source of no end of amusement to his children, despite the respect they are expected to show towards parents. Yet he still had room for another such meal with Maki. If one doubted it one had only to look at his form—the capacity it indicated. Maki often wondered how he got through that narrow door at the head of the staircase.

Food acted on Mukerjee's constitution as liquor does on others. His nerves were dulled with over surfeiting. His eyes took on a blank expression and his words broadened and slid into one another. Had

Mukerjee eaten solely to see how far food could give him the sensations that liquor is reported to bestow upon people, one might have understood his gluttony. But Mukerjee had whisky, too, to indulge in. A bottle or two were always stored away in Maki's cupboard. Most wealthy Indians drink whisky. It is a taste they have acquired from the European.

Mukerjeesat with Maki in the open doorway. Most of the doors in this establishment were open. When the men grew amorous, the curtain was drawn, or the door flanks put partly together. There were several floors in the building and there was the central courtyard, upon the rails of which the room lights cast a soft unsteady orange glow at irregular distances. As Maki's room was by the staircase on a lower floor, she could see most of the men pass. There were men of all conditions and varieties—but mostly all Hindus, of the higher religious orders. No Europeans, Mohammedans, or Parsees ever came there. It was a residence for women, most of them the second or third wives of wealthy Indians, who had excluded their newest connubial acquisitions from their own homes be-

cause of the romance and intrigue that is imparted in visiting another woman elsewhere. The original wives passed solitary nights except when the men were too ill or too tired to leave them. At the same time, the new wives did not always have the full of their evenings, nor yet every evening. There were often still other wives tucked away in other buildings. But Maki had the full of Mukerjee's time: she was his newest love, and the one he held dearest.

There were two hundred and seventeen women in this building, each with a room to herself, a low dingy room with bleak dismal doors that looked as if they were in the last stages of decay. Each room had to itself a section of veranda that hung out upon the street, and here women would sit after darkness had blurred their features, with a dim orange glow cast by a small smoky oil lamp that hung behind them, bright enough to limn their forms through their white garment; and so they would dream through the long evenings. A frequent jingle of bangles would tell of a woman restraining a straying tress, or adjusting her arms in a more comfortable attitude. Within

women sang to the accompaniment of soft toned harmoniums, that brayed at the pauses. The atmosphere around was heavy with perfume, scents that rested on the night, and transformed that dirty back street into a section of paradise, as is told of in Indian fables. There was song and scent and women's whispering laughter. What could the heart of man want more to delight it?

Toton, who had taken unto himself two further wives—at intervals—whilst Maki's mother was still with the living, never thought it worth while that one at least of these should be brought home to guide the growing hours for Maki. Out of home they retained a romance about them that fled on their arrival in the zenana. One of these women shared the building with Maki. She had a room on the same floor, on the other side of the courtyard. Maki sometimes saw her father pass. She learnt to recognize his heavy pace on the stairs, and the thud of his fat stick, and would always look away. But from the corner of her eyes she could notice as he passed his fingers playing with his curled grey moustache, putting it into place as it were before it met on the lips of his

lover; and the contented smile of satisfaction this brought him.

Mukerjee entertained Maki and amused her. Though his visits robbed her of slumber, what knew she of the passing of hours. Time is told by sunrise and sunset, and while Mukerjee revelled in a perfumed night-time Maki suppressed her yawns and laughed with her admirer, submitting to him as she had to her husband or the tall youth with the wavy hair. To her it was merely a mode of masculine diversion, a right expected by all men of women.

Maki was sitting with Mukerjee one evening as usual, and as yet the door was open. Mukerjee was in a more playful mood than ever. A skinny lawyer had passed, his black alpaca coat very frayed at the shoulders.

Mukerjee laughed heartily.

"Gopal!" he called pleasantly. The lawyer paused and entered. "Gopal," said Mukerjee, his words almost unintelligible because of his laughter, "if I didn't shave for four days, my chin would look like your shoulders.

Nobody laughed but Mukerjee. Gopal was too absorbed in Maki's beauty.

He touched his fingers together and bowed his head in respectful greeting, then grinned through bashfulness. Mukerjee, meanwhile, was helpless through laughing. Maki dropped her long lashes on her cheeks modestly.

"My name is Gopal, sister," said the lawyer, bowing meekly. "I come here every evening. Should you ever want me you have only to ask for Gopal."

Mukerjee at this recovered his gravity.

"You lawyer dogs. You are always here, as we know only too sadly."

Lawyers haunt such precincts and doze in odd corners all night after a heavy day's labours. They are ever expectant that a broil will develop. Then there is a scramble amongst lawyers for custom, and the raucous touting of lawyers invades a scene where till recently love was whispered.

The lawyer grinned again, then bowed humbly. He took another fixed look at Maki and smiled with satisfaction.

"Get out," said Mukerjee, touched by the hand of jealousy. "Get out," and he made a struggle to stand up.

By the time Mukerjee's rotund form was

perpendicular, the lawyer had vanished; and Mukerjee on reaching the door ran into the erect form of Toton, who was twisting his grey moustache for the delectation of his lover.

"Ah, Toton, brother, and how do I find you?" Mukerjee was one enormous open mouth when he spoke. He oozed his greeting.

"I am very much well, brother. And how do I find you. I see as fat as ever, eh?" It is remarkable how often Indians amongst themselves converse in English. Then lapsing into Bengali, Toton went on, "Hello. What's this you've got here? A rare article, a nice article, is she not?" Toton waved an arm pointing to Maki.

Mukerjee released a smile, then eclipsed it by a mouth wide open.

"Look from where you are, brother, but come no nearer." He placed his hand on his chest. "She is my property, and only just now the lawyer Gopal was very nearly beaten for much the same reason."

Toton pulled a long face and tried to peep at Maki, who had pulled the front of her *sari*

down completely over her features at the entry of her father. She felt that if he saw her all her liberty would be over. He would drag her back to the latticed room, and submit her to torture. If she recovered she would no doubt be handed back to her husband, the stupid young son of the man who called himself Rajah. Maki's heart beat so loudly, she feared her father would hear it. She feared a thousand things. He might recognize the outline of her form . . . and already his hand was upon the covering that concealed her vision. The edge of it was lifted. Maki saw the orange light fall upon the tip of her nose and chin. She could see Toton's shod feet. Then all seemed to go black before her. The covering fell once more between the light and her chin and Toton was taken out of the room, with his neck between Mukerjee's fingers.

In a twinkling a dozen lawyers were on the scene. Toton swung round and slapped Mukerjee in the face, and the lawyers essayed to make peace between them. Mukerjee released Toton's neck after the slap descended, and held his arm out to re-secure it, but his hand was stayed by a lawyer.

Another lawyer gripped Toton by the shoulders. Maki was horrified at the scene and ran into the veranda. It was just as well that she did, for she could hardly restrain the effort, even from there, to come to the assistance of her father. Toton and Mukerjee from cursing each other fell to cursing the lawyers, and each saw how the situation would develop if it were dragged into the lawcourts.

Mukerjee was the first to offer his apologies.

"My dear friend," he said, holding out his free hand to Toton. "I think I had too much wine this evening."

"I think so too," said Toton, and they both laughed.

Then turning upon the lawyers, both drove them away and shook hands heartily.

"I am sorry, Brother Toton. It was that lawyer that incensed me. Had he not looked at my girl so fixedly I should not have been so mad with jealousy when you entered. Come, brother, come in now and you can see her."

Toton, fearing a resuscitation of the

jealousy and the scene it had been the cause of, declined the offer. But Mukerjee would not take a refusal. He led Toton by the hand and drew him into the chamber. But Maki was not there. Down the veranda she had fled, past the other rooms and round the corner. Mukerjee peered into the veranda, turning his head to look down both sides.

"She has gone," he said apologetically. "She is a shy little creature.

Toton, happy to be excused what he by this time regarded as a duty, explained :

"Another time will surely do, brother. She is not running away, is she?"

"No, no, not running away. What do you take her for?"

"Then I am going, brother."

The two men salaamed to each other a great number of times and patted each other fondly. Mukerjee then returned to the veranda. Maki had crept stealthily back and was near at hand now that Toton had departed. Her heart was still thumping heavily. Mukerjee put his hand upon it to still it.

"Poor frightened thing. What is there to be afraid of?"

Maki was silent. Mukerjee flattered himself that the girl's heart beat for himself. Was she not shy of all others?

Mukerjee did not stop Toton another time.

XII

THE sight of Toton at such close quarters, his voice, the wave of his hand, his manner, brought back to Maki's mind the days of her childhood. She did not yearn for them. But she wished to revisit them. She could not, of course, return to the room with the lattice-window, but what was there to prevent her from returning to the narrow gully, from talking to the flute-player, and perhaps his son, if he was still there.

Whenever Maki wished to go out she had the use of Mukerjee's motor-car at her disposal. She soon gratified her desire for driving in a motor.

Mukerjee took her to the theatres and the cinemas. In the early days Maki used to question him as to when she was to begin her performances; but Mukerjee put her off with vain "to-morrows." Later Mukerjee revealed to her all the unpleasant sides of

theatrical living, the meagre wage, the arduous task. He meant to turn her mind completely from it; and as Maki got all the fruits of life without effort she soon abandoned the idea of a stage career, and settled down to the leisured ease that Mukerjee provided. In time she learnt from the conversation of her neighbours, the mysteries of life and the ways of the world. Of course it did not seem wrong to her. It only seemed natural, since she and everybody else she could see around her behaved in a like manner.

Maki drove down the lane which held the joys of her childhood in a covered car. She feared some servants of Toton's house might recognize her. Once she talked to the flute-player. She bought from him his best flute and payed him for it lavishly. She talked to him too of his son, asked if the boy was at sea, and the flute-player told her an extraordinary story.

The night Maki had fled, the flute-player's son had been called to rejoin his vessel. Toton, who had had the neighbourhood scoured for Maki's recovery, wondered when his men returned without Maki as to who else

had left the neighbourhood at about the same time. Men were put upon this quest. The flute-player's son, the *ghari wallah's* nephew and the umbrella maker's brother, all workers in the same vessel, had been called at the same time to rejoin it. These were the departures that night, they reported. Toton mounted the stairs to the deserted room and peered through the lattice window. The window looked out on to the flute-player's thatch. Neither the *ghari wallah's* hut nor the umbrella-maker's little room was visible. Toton felt sure the flute-player's son had eloped with Maki. He knew the boy could not take her on board with him, but he must have kept her, he felt, in a hut somewhere, to await the return of his vessel. The flute had charms, he reasoned. The boy was young and good-looking. He was the only one of the three men not yet married. Toton recalled that Brhomo had told him, in the earliest days of Maki's suspected madness, that her greatest attraction had been the window. Toton felt sure that the elopement had been born of a window flirtation. He nailed up that window: it was like shutting the stable-door after the steed has departed.

Toton also set men to wait for the return of the flute-player's boy. He felt confident the boy would return; but there was little hope that he would bring Maki with him: in elopements, he reasoned, men soon tire of the girls, or the woman elope with another.

Toton sent for the flute-player. He cross-examined him in great detail. He vowed he would have his house burnt down whilst he was snugly asleep within it. The flute-player, who only slept indoors in the winter, had slept outside all through chilly December and January, and had as a legacy a cough that saw him into March and April. And now, early in May, as Maki talked to him, his cough still lingered. He gave her an exhibition to show how much vitality there was still left it. He did not, of course, recognize Maki. He had never before seen her.

His son had returned after the winter. He had been to many parts.

Maki wished the man would go on with his narrative.

The flute-player went on. Tears stood in his eyes and his voice quivered: "Some lying dog of a slave bore the boy a grudge,

for some mysterious reason; or perhaps he thought that in this way he would put an end to the whole bothersome matter of Maki. This man had sworn that he had seen Maki and the boy go off together, that my boy had a red bundle under his arm—when the boy's blankets were all grey—and that the girl clung to him affectionately. A curse upon that Maki."

Maki squirmed, and went queer all over.

"They used to wait for the boy in street corners, and by the dock-side for hours together. Some knew the name of the vessel, and they watched in numbers when it was time for its arrival. My poor boy! They met him at the corner of Chitpore and Zachariah Road, by the side of the great mosque, the Nakuda Musjid, in the evening time, at the hour of prayer, when the Mohammedans were crying aloud unto their Allah——" The old man shook with sobbing.

"Go on," said Maki softly.

"What will I tell you, my daughter?" He could see enough of Maki's features to know that she was youthful. "It was some rowdies who beat him, the *gonda sallahs*!

Toton Babu had hired them for the purpose. A curse upon him unto the seventeenth generation. May his”

“And your boy?”

The flute-player shook his head sadly.

“He was ill for many days,” he said. “Here in this home I nursed him. Look, see. This is the very cot on which he lay.” Again the old man sobbed. “Here he played when a child, lying here and kicking up his heels, as children do.” Once more he shook his head sadly.

“And where is he now?” Maki asked softly. She began to fear from the old man’s distress that the boy was dead. Though she had never known the boy, for some strange reason, since a child, her heart had turned towards him. Besides, now, in some way, it seemed as if she had been responsible for the harm that had come to him.

“My boy? They have sent him to prison.”

“To prison?”

“Yes to prison, my daughter. At the corner of this street one night he beat Toton and his servants, when they were coming home at some small hour of the morning. It

was only right they should have their revenge. There were some friends and neighbours the boy had got together for the purpose. Do you not think it was done justly?"

The remark "Quite" stuck in Maki's throat.

"Then," went on the flute-player, "they trumped up a charge against him. I was sitting here at evening tide, warbling on my flute the tunes I played to my dead wife when she and I were children, and a strange man came in to greet me. Did I know he had been hired by Toton? Had I known it would I have sat with him? Or talked? Or given him goodly greeting? When my back was turned to blow the water out of my hookah, that son of a swine produced some silver ware from his garments and hid them under the mattress of my poor child."

Maki and he shook their heads almost simultaneously, sadly.

"Toton in the evening summoned the police. The rooms of his servants were searched, also all the huts in the neighbourhood. My son was home then. He had been standing out here whistling to the

pigeons." How well Maki remembered him whistling to the pigeons. "Here, my daughter, whistling to these pigeons," he pointed to the sky where the pigeons fluttered, "and seeing the police he followed them curiously to witness the *tamasha*."¹

There was a pause of a moment.

"Here, 'neath this mattress they found all the silver, and my boy that night was taken by the police to the prison."

Again the heads shook together. The old man placed his hand on the motor door and drew his mouth nearer the curtains. "When he comes out," he whispered hoarsely, "there will be murder. My boy has vowed it. All the *khallasies*² from his ship have sworn to help him. Then may Kali help Toton, and keep him in safety." The man laughed sneeringly.

"And when will your boy come out?"

"In another two months. The sentence was for six months altogether."

Maki unfolded a ten rupee note from her *sari* and held it out to the flute-player. His eyes twinkled as he took the money and he

¹ Fun.

² Ship's hands.

blessed Maki reverently, after the approved fashion of the Indians, praying to Heaven that her seed should develop, and that the children from her may be counted in dozens.

"And your boy," said Maki, "can you take me to see him?"

"I can, my daughter," said the old man proudly. "I can take you this evening. But who are you that you are interested?"

"No, no, not this evening. I will come again to-morrow."

"But who are you?" persisted the player.

Maki gave an order for the car to turn; and sank back within the curtains. The old man followed the car as it turned, running abreast of the window.

"And who are you?" he was saying. "Who are you, my daughter?"

Maki preferred not to answer.

"Who are you?" called the man, this time more loudly than ever. "If you do not tell me I cannot take you."

Maki drew to the curtains, and placing a finger on her lips said:

"Shoosh," softly. "I am a hater of Toton's, I am a woman he has defrauded and wronged most bitterly. I want to help

your son to mete out this punishment to him."

The old man chuckled, and Maki drove away, surprised at the pace of her education.

XIII

MAKI went to see Hira, the son of the flute-player, the next day. The boy stared at her through the bars, wondering what had brought her; and then he ceased wondering, for he was struck by her compelling beauty. He admired the waves in her raven tresses that still descended down her back, and were not rolled up in the European mode of *coiffure*. He gazed at their gloss, he loved the delicate twinkle in her eyes that peeped slyly from the corners, and he positively adored that droop in the corner of her lower lip that was not marked enough to suggest a sneer, but seemed to say that the lips were tired through kissing. He wondered what had brought Maki to see him, and then flattered himself that she had been struck by his appearance.

Hira was in truth a handsome boy of the strong muscular type, with bulging arms and calves, and jaws firm as a rock. He had a happy smile that brightened up his clean features. Maki had not quite made up her mind that she was in love with him. She merely wished to see him to satisfy a sentiment and desire that had grown with her from childhood; and having seen him she admired him.

Maki went to the prison many times and each visit rather deepened her admiration. Hira, meanwhile, quite apart from the attraction Maki's beauty compelled, was convincing himself he was in love with her because she was his admirer. Mukerjee knew nothing at all about all this. He only saw Maki in the evenings. Maki, besides, having learnt the art of guile, had preferred to make her visits to the prison in a hackney carriage, in order to silence the tongue of Mukerjee's chauffeur.

In time Hira was released from his confinement, and he asked Maki to marry him. For a moment he hesitated as he thought of their different social positions. Maki was rich apparently. But he dismissed this from

his mind with the thought that she must love him dearly. And so she did. Maki and Hira were united, without the outward form and ceremony of religion, and Maki gave up her room in the women's mansion, and entered a little hut Hira had taken for her. Mukerjee came as usual that evening, but Maki was missing. He vowed all sorts of things and wept in his confusion, wept in the arms of Gopal the lawyer. He told his woes to Toton, who was there that evening. Toton's only comfort for him was that girls nowadays are always eloping, and mentioned the instance of his own daughter. Little did he know that both instances were connected with one and the same person.

The conditions of Maki's new life were very different from anything she had yet known. Never before had she lived in a hut. Never before had she found food so precarious. Hira was not exactly lazy. Perhaps he had been overworked in prison, perhaps he was ashamed to show himself in public. Perhaps he felt that work on land would not quite suit him after his sea experience. Perhaps he was too much in love with Maki to leave her even for a moment.

He was with her always. Existence was idyllic even in that crumbling hut where flies swarmed and into which goats and stray bulls wandered. Hira could play the flute too, and he played it divinely. So, at least, it seemed to Maki. She would go back in her mind to her father's side street and the lattice-window, against the bars of which she had pressed her face till their prints were left on her forehead. Did she dream then that some day, in this hut. . . . It was all too good to be true. And yet it was true. Was not Hira there with his legs crossed, lightly fingering the flute of bamboo?

For some days Maki lived on the proceeds from the jewels Mukerjee had at different times given her. They were sold at a sacrifice, because the goldsmiths could see that Hira had no idea of their value. Hira had to take them wrapped securely in the folds of his garment, lest people might question him as to how he had got them. He had a reputation to live down, having just left prison.

In Calcutta the police keep a record of criminals, as they do in practically all other large cities. Hira was a marked man. His

address was known. The police kept an eye on all his movements. Plain clothes Indian detectives followed him on occasions from a distance. Hira learned to fear them and avoid them. Whenever a robbery or dacoity was committed a call would be made upon Hira to ask where he was at the precise moment of the happening. This among other things clouded Maki's happiness. But if adversity, like opposition, strengthens love, in any way it certainly strengthened Maki's. Hitherto she had been courted at various times by the imbecile son of a would-be Rajah, a wavy-haired youth, and a fat-waisted theatre proprietor. Now she had a man who was more suited to her fancy, and one, because of childish associations, she regarded as the love of a lifetime. It was the love of a lifetime. Maki gave him love such as at few times human beings extend to one another. Many men and women are just fond of each other. In other cases the man loves and the girl is merely responsive. In a few instances both man and wife adore each other. But Maki worshipped Hira. Had Hira cut her head off Maki's spirit would have been willing to rise and kiss his fingers.

It was the love of the weaker for the stronger, the love of the protected for the protector, the unison of two hearts that, Maki at any rate felt, were made for one another by the Creator and united almost since childhood. Existence could no more be anything for Maki apart from Hira, and she could not imagine how she had ever existed without him. She hadn't exactly. It wasn't existence: her past had been a lingering torture. And it wasn't quite without Hira. Maki's earliest memory was the music of the flute-player, and the call of Hira for the pigeons.

The scene of this ideal feminine devotion was laid in a squalid slum of Calcutta, in a narrow lane that ran at an angle from Cooloo-tollah not quite far down enough to verge into the dens of the Tibetans and the Chinese, but near enough to opium houses kept by Indians, and toddy shops where rowdy revelry grew in volume right up to the closing hour. Here idle wasters, men only, would lounge with eyes sodden with liquor, or lean against each other, and striking the shoulders friendlily tell of love and infamy and much else that is quite unprintable.

Though a slum, this lane holds a number

of restaurants, Hindu meat houses where the issuing steam marked the site of feasting Indians; while at intervals, little stalls—splashes of vivid colour—displayed their glittering bottles of sherbet, that the flies danced round in gregarious merriment.

The Indian woman takes no part in any social function. Hers the place by the stove and the children. Men dine out if they wish to, men indulge in sherbet, they treat themselves to liquor when the desire prompts them, and none of these diversions do they share with their women. The wife, the mother and the daughter, with the tiniest of tottering little ones, sit at the hut door, talking of bogies and fairies or the more commonplace doings of their neighbours.

Outside each hut is a mound of refuse, flung by the energetic housewife out of pots and pans and cooking utensils. Kites sweep down upon these, and in them too pariah dogs bury their noses. Timid crows caw from a distance and approach more cautiously, only to be scared away by the glance of a grovelling mongrel. Infants, mud-splashed and naked, tumble over stones and over each other, and give vent to

yells to celebrate the fall of man in his very infancy.

The busy mothers are always grumbling. They tell of the sins of their husbands and fathers, the mischief of their little ones, they cry out their poverty, and proclaim family feuds in top-toned accents, so that all who pass may hear them. Passers-by with leisure stop and indulge in conversation, others fling a jest and pass on.

A youth comes by with a cloth over his shoulder. He spreads it upon the earth in a corner that is little frequented. The people around have seen him before and know what he has come for. Out comes three cards—a picture and two others. The wives bring out their money and every passer-by pauses to place a stake as the active hands of the youth shifts the downturned cards from position to position.

“Find the picture and you take the money. Find the picture,” he calls, “and you take the money.”

He gathers in the coins now when they lose, pays out when they win, folds up his cloth as he espies a policeman, and begins to examine on his calf a scar that has been

newly painted, as if in that alone has the crowd been interested.

A gaudy Mohammedan, holding aloft two wax figures, passes. "*Tamasha*," he sings, distorting his features to lend his voice volume, "*Tamasha*"; and all the children gather round him giggling. He clatters the wooden hands of the figures and makes the two wax queens quarrel. "*Tamasha*," he sings again and is gone. The women have no money to indulge their little ones.

Presently a man comes along with a rattle. On his shoulder is a high bough, held aloft, on which circle a hundred paper windmills. They are a farthing each, but the children of the slum cannot afford to buy them. The little ones follow the man all down the street till he vanishes in a busier thoroughfare, and the stentorian calls of their mothers bring them back again to the hut side, grinning and delighted with merely the sight of the treasure.

Maki lived in the midst of all this. She was supremely happy. She had her Hira. He was almost always with her. He loved the new found joys of love as much as she did, and with his flute to his lips and she snugly nestling beside him, nothing in his

mind could be more akin to Paradise. He played her the lays that she had heard his father play in the days when Maki, as an infant, climbed the knees of old Nishi her ayah. Neither Maki nor Hira gave a thought to Toton, they were too supremely happy to bother about anything.

But the mind of man is active, and so are his spirit and his disposition. A woman might be content, as Maki was, to live in love always, with nothing else in life to divert her. But Hira felt he could not always be fluting, nor yet sit for hours between the wall and Maki. He hadn't money to buy any pigeons, but he wandered out to see what he could do in the bazaars. Wherever he wandered the police seemed to follow him. And he and the other ex-convicts were naturally brought closer together because of their common condition.

It wasn't long before Hira wandered from the meat houses to the toddy shops, and from liquor to opium. Some nights he came home drunk. Maki could never forget the first time this happened. She was sorry for him; she handled him tenderly. Sometimes Hira never came home at all but passed the night

in the opium dens sleeping off the deep sleep imposed by this weed of poison. But Maki forgave Hira everything. She loved him and that was the only thing that mattered; so long as he did not kill himself she knew she would have him to make her happy.

This was in the early days of 1915, while the Great War raged in Europe, and the waves of crime that were rippling in every country, in the city of Calcutta took on the form of dacoity. In the restaurants and in the drinking dens the criminals would whisper to one another and concert plans for the perpetration of most daring dacoities.

Hira had no settled employment. For all practical purposes he was a criminal like the rest of his companions. He was naturally sucked into the great schemes that they were projecting most carefully.

Hira was not always drunk, nor was he always a victim to opium. There were evenings when as before he sat by the side of Maki and fondled her tresses, or trolled to her on the flute, or told her tales of the sea and the many lands he had visited. At such moments he made up for all his delinquencies. Maki could forget a thousand drink-

ing bouts and a thousand nights spent by him in the damp silence of the opium smokers.

On such nights of her husband's absence, Maki was the victim of the attentions of her neighbours. Men who had admired her in silence while the stern presence of Hira kept them at a distance, used to come to her hut door singly in the darkness and whisper to her of love and the stars and things told of in songs and in stories. Maki was seized with feelings of repulsion. What did she want with other men when she had her Hira? When she had him for ten nights could she not spare him for one of them? Maki did not welcome their attentions. She told the men so frankly. She feared not to come out and say so. Her brief but varied contact with the male world had given her more self confidence than a lifetime's freedom had done for others. But the men were not to be so easily diverted from their purpose. They knew the proverb that water can wear away stone, and held store in persistence. They quarrelled among themselves and flashed knives at each other. Maki was very grieved that she should unwittingly be the cause of strife and dissension; but how could

she prevent it? If she was stern and said firmly she would not hear them, they redoubled their efforts. Were she reasoning, they thought she was giving way before the force of their perseverance. She could hardly wholly ignore them. Men's forms outside her hut, flitting in the darkness and amongst the shadows, would give rise to scandal, and the women of the neighbourhood were not slow to believe dreadful things of one another.

Already they addressed her as "*Ho, runai,*"¹ and when she passed they would point to her and say loudly, "Was it not last night that So-and-So was seen to be with her? And the night before Such-a-one and Such-a-one?"

Maki already trembled to think that such idle tales might in time reach her husband. She did not know that suspicions strengthen the affection. She feared that she might lose him if he believed what others chose to tell him about her. And then on one course alone she had determined.

Maki decided upon telling Hira the exact facts before any other versions could reach

¹ Bad woman.

him from neighbours. She knew the men themselves would be eager to tell him tales of one another, in the hope that he might leave Maki for ever and the coast would be clear for their individual chances. But determine as often as she would Maki could never get her mouth to shape the statement. She did not know how to start; she could not think which would be the best opportunity. When nestling against him she felt she ought not to let a serious discourse mar their momentary happiness. When he was arriving or departing she felt that he was not quite settled to listen to something that demanded all his attention. Special times are required for a communication of such importance. One cannot tell it at any odd moment.

But no sooner was Hira gone than Maki's trouble would reflood her brain. She would blame herself for delaying unduly, and would promptly decide to tell him all the next time he entered. And then, when he came, her heart would fail her. Suppose he should not believe her. Suppose her remark might give birth in his mind to suspicions. Suppose, anxious to have other views about it, he should go out and ask of the neigh-

bours. Then would he believe her, or would he believe the others? Maki should like to have felt that Hira would believe her alone against a whole street lined up to swear to the contrary. But love does at times give rise to misgivings. And Maki's heart failed her. She could not put Hira's love to the test for fear it should be weighed and found wanting.

One night when Hira was away as usual at an opium den, and old Panu, with the shaggy beard, came to her door in order to demand admittance, Maki, as she sometimes did, maintained rigid silence. Panu strode in and seized her by the shoulders. Maki's first impulse was to scream, but she restrained it. She did not wish to attract the attention of the others. For them to come swarming in to see Panu with his hands on her shoulders, or how else she did not know, was too dreadful. She did not know how Panu might take it into his head to compromise her. There would then be a rare scandal. People would be certain to talk about what had roused them from their slumbers.

In an instant Maki decided upon her course of action. She gripped old Panu by

the throat, and dragged him choking out of her hut. Here she closed her fingers upon his flesh a trifle more firmly, said to him hoarsely before releasing him, "Go, go, and don't you ever come again to pester me."

Panu was sore incensed. Rubbing his neck with his fingers and fearing to rush at her lest he get the worst of a physical conflict and receive injuries more visible than the mere pressure on his throat of fingers, he preferred to resort to curses. He cursed Maki loudly; making coarse jests about her name, jests that British soldiers know as "Teddy Markham," that questioned the morality of her mother.

Maki, staggered by her own bold action rather than by what Panu chose to call out about her, passed a restless night till morning, when worked up by the thoughts inspired by her dreadful experience, she determined to tell the drowsy, staggering figure of her husband all about it.

He listened to it all with utter indifference. Perhaps he was too tired and sleepy to have assimilated all she told him. When she had done he tumbled into a heap in a corner, and was for all practical purposes lifeless.

Maki, now that she had at last got herself to talk to Hira about a subject that had taxed her mind for many days, did not wish to leave it so hurriedly. She told him of the attentions the other men around had constantly thrust upon her. How unpleasing it all was for her. She told him of Panu and his raid upon her privacy the night previous. Hira made a pointless pun about Panu and *pani*¹ which merely served to show how uncollected his thoughts were.

Maki, incensed at his total indifference, chided him about the way in which he left her frequently—unprotected. She blamed him for the insults she had received. If he were doing some work, and work had taken him from her it might have been different. But to go and get drunk——

“That is my work,” snapped Hira, suddenly waking up. “And if you don’t like it you can go to the devil.”

Maki winced.

“Yes, go to the devil. Why can’t I have friends if I want to? You are an abominable bother. I come home tired and I find I can’t go to sleep because of your nagging.

¹ Water.

Why——? I am going to leave you. Not for another moment shall we share the same roof."

He strode out of the house and went to sleep on the pavement. When he awoke, which was when the sun was high in the heavens, he came in again as if nothing had happened. He had forgotten that anything had happened. He found Maki's silence strange, but she soon warmed again. She did not in any way desire to prolong the unpleasantness.

The only memory that Hira seemed to retain of the affair was that the words, "if he were doing some work," had apparently stung him deeply. He resolved upon work. But what sort of work, was the question. He had roved the high seas once and he thought that it would not be a bad thing if he now traversed the high roads instead. There was a similarity, he felt, between the two occupations. So he set out to learn to drive a taxi. This was easily done. He embraced a licensed driver and took him into a toddy house and stuffed him with liquor. Then he embraced him again, and they kissed each other. After that they were blood relations.

The taxi driver vowed he would do anything on earth for his new found brother, and Hira asked to be allowed to sit beside him in the taxi as his assistant. Those were in the days before drivers' assistants were licensed. Actually the assistants did more driving than the drivers, so that Hira was soon very efficient. He was given his own car and decorated with a number, and thereafter he lolled in Chowringhee tootling his motor-horn to attract the sahibs' and the memsahibs' attention as they passed on the pavements or emerged from the shops and the cafés.

He brought home some interesting tales to tell Maki, particularly of the sahibs' and memsahibs doings. Hira was usually late in returning. He never seemed to finish work till one or two in the morning; often later. And he came home with the tinkle of *bucksheesh* in his pockets and on his lips a blessing for the kind sahibs.

"To-night," he would say, "E-straker memsahib went for a drive with the doctor, and they were sitting so close together you couldn't blow smoke through their shoulders."

"Oh!" exclaimed Maki.

“And the night before I had E-straker sahib and the aunt of the lawyer. The funny thing is,” Hira went on, “that these people do not try and conceal that they are married. Well, how can they? They are known to one another. But E-straker memsahib talked all the time about what E-straker sahib did when he went shooting last year, though what E-straker memsahib did during that same time would be more interesting. And the doctor sahib talked of his wife and how ill she had been feeling. ‘And does she think you are out on a case now?’ E-straker memsahib would question. And the doctor would only laugh in answer. These are funny people, they are certainly,” Hira would comment.

“And what do they do in the taxi?” Maki demanded simply.

“How should I know?” was Hira’s rejoinder. “So long as he pays me handsomely, why should I look round. They drive down Gharra Hat Road mostly, where to the sides stand a number of private cars with handkerchiefs hung over the numbers. But that road is very busy now. At nights it is busier than Chowringhee. Many people

drive in the direction of Budge Budge. It is darker there and much more romantic. The sahib I took there to-night with a dancing girl from the Belaiti theatre gave me three rupees as *bucksheesh*." He held out the glittering coins for Maki to see them.

Hira was not long a taxi-driver before his criminal friends harnessed him for their purpose. Dacoities were usually committed with the aid of taxis. The vehicles were useful when it came to absconding. Hira was their friend. He had previously helped them in minor burglaries. Now that it came to a big thing with bigger stakes—well, in any case how could he say them nay? How should he meet them again in the drink shops and on the mat of the opium den keeper?

XIV

WHEN the night of the dacoity arrived the first call the dacoits made was at the house of a newspaper reporter. Motuldar, of the *Englishman*, lived in Chitpore, and he was surprised by the visit of the dacoits. They were friends of his and he knew that some night they would be coming. But that very night he had not expected them. Consequently, whereas he had been ready for bed, he had to dress again and proceed to Hare Street so that the *Englishman* should have a full version of the affair in the paper the following morning, in precedence of all other local journals. Indians will do a good deal to help one another. An uncle of Motuldar's was amongst the dacoits and a mere request from the reporter that he should be kept in touch with their activities, because of his

own prospects on the paper, brought about this visit.

The dacoity took place. Hira got a share of the booty, and made merry for many nights in the restaurants and the drinking houses with his companions, celebrating a victory of the Bolshevik order against the capitalist. The police did not find the culprits, but as the papers said, "the authorities were making vigorous inquiries." Encouraged by such alertness on the part of the authorities, Hira's taxi was destined to play a similar part a number of times in the future; and Motuldar scored a series of *coups* for his paper.

When Hira was not in the arms of opium, or alternately in the arms of Maki, with her watching to respond to every whim of his variable disposition, he was waiting in the taxi stands in Chowringhee, his legs protruding over the wind screen of the car with his toes pointing heavenwards. Panu drove a *ghari* and had a stand adjacent to Hira's. When a sahib passed who merely glanced in their direction, Hira and Panu and a dozen others controlling horses and motors would dash out

to serve him. As the sahib only has one body, and even if he is one of a party he generally prefers to take his friends in the same cab with him, a great number of those demonstrating such an amount of energy had to be disappointed. But they felt it was worth the perseverance, as the sahib usually took the first conveyance that came up to him. The race was, therefore, worth the competition. Sahibs also generally prefer to take a taxi to a *ghari*, it lends them an air of prosperity and enhances, so far as appearances go, their monthly salaries, though it diminishes it not a little actually. So Panu had a series of disappointments, and as he knew Hira personally, his abuse was released against him mainly.

“You, *salla*.”

“You are the *salla*,” Hira would tell him. “Listen all you others,” he would call aloud so that everybody in Chowringhee and a great many others not in Chowringhee might hear him. “Listen to stupid Panu. He has got here two frogs for horses and he expects the sahibs to take him.”

¹ Brother-in-law; it is considered degrading to be called brother-in-law.

"Frogs," said another, the driver of a *ghari*. "They are not frogs—they are dead rats. Ho Panu, this stand is only for *gharis* drawn by horses."

Panu was a man who lacked originality. "And yours, *sallas*"—he was quite incensed by this time—"are neither frogs nor horses."

His words were drowned in shouts of laughter, which he tried to overtop, but failed to do deplorably; as the louder he screamed still louder laughed the others. By this time a fare was visible in the distance and, still shouting, still laughing, the various drivers of cabs and taxis spurted their way in his direction.

"Listen to Panu's *ghari*," yelled Hira as soon as the noise had died sufficiently to make his voice audible. "Listen to his *ghari*. He should hire it out for weddings. They would not require a band then."

Panu flicked his whip in the direction of Hira. The sahib meanwhile had entered another taxi.

"Come along, *salla*," yelled Hira to Panu, "you think you can whip me. Come along."

"And you come along," screamed Panu, anger still checking originality. "Come along you of the dog caste."

They called "come alongs" to each other for a long while, waving whip and tooting motor-horn, and their language was interspersed with words that will never find a place in printed vocabularies.

Lookers-on urged them on with a series of calls of: "*Maro salla*; hit him, hit him."

Nothing, however, so interesting and diverting transpired, but their shouts to each other resulted in a series of revelations about each other's morality, that was perhaps not wholly accurate. But litigious as the Indians may be the law of libel is an unknown quantity to the greater part of the population. Consequently Hira heard a good deal about his mother and sister and wife and daughter that he could not for a moment regard as authentic. He gave in return, however, as good as he received.

But this constant bickering on the stands together with the treatment he had received at the hands of Maki, Panu bore as a grudge against her and Hira, particularly against

the latter. He took it upon himself to keep a watch on Hira and voluntarily informed the police that his actions were of a very suspicious nature.

As Hira had been out of prison over a year now, the police had of late grown slack and had not maintained so close a watch on his movements. Panu had by dint of close observation discovered, even with his dull comprehension, that although Hira was rarely home till the small hours of the morning, he never by any chance was at home at all on a night a dacoity had been committed. Concluding a great many things, Panu went to the police and told them that Hira had in a burst of confidence told him how he had assisted the dacoits with his taxi and that it would be as well to make a note about this. The police did and Panu came home chuckling into his grizzly beard.

Hira's method of evading detection on the occasions on which he assisted the dacoits was to remove the numbers fore and aft from his vehicle and draw an oil-cloth over the bonnet. If anyone was on his trail, he increased speed in order to escape arrest. But after

Panu's conversation with the police authorities, they made it a point, the next time a dacoity was committed, to make inquiries as to what precisely Hira's motor had been doing at that moment. It was not easy to discover straight away that he was involved in the bulk of the dacoities. There were always a number of excuses he had at hand—driving jute men back to their mills, odd visitors from Barrackpore back to that station. In time, though, these inquiries were carefully followed up, and when the police learnt definitely that Hira did play a part in dacoities Hira was missing. Like most criminals he absconded when he felt the time was drawing nigh for him to do so, and Maki was left alone without a word of warning.

Maki's house was watched. Often a policeman would question her, talk to her roughly, and then winking promise to leave her in peace if she would come away with him. Panu, happy that Hira was away for an indefinite time at any rate, once again renewed his attentions. So also did Taki and Moona and a whole heap of idlers that were in the neighbourhood. The women of the district

were not fond of Maki, and circulated queer tales about her. In time even the Tibetans and the Chinese from the further regions of that narrow street came along to speak to her.

One day a Kabuli came, a tall hook-nosed man from Afghanistan, dressed in blue and carrying a heavy *dunda*.¹ His shoulders were bent and he had a scowling aspect. There are thousands like him in Calcutta. They carry on a trade as money-lenders, exact forbidding interests, and make weird threats by shaking their sticks at their victims. Every woman and child in the city fears them. The children scream and run away when they see them, as they would from a boggy.

The Agha² came to Maki and waved his *dunda* at her.

"Let me come in," he said gloomily, "or you will know all about it."

Maki trembled; but she did not answer.

"Move away," he said gruffly, brushing Maki aside from the entrance and entering

¹ Stick.

² Kabuli.

her little hut, which he filled with his burly figure.

Maki let him enter, then tripped aside and ran out into the open street. The Agha stalked out heavily after her, still waving his wand. There wasn't a crowd to witness this commotion. Everybody hides when a Kabuli looms on the horizon.

Maki bounded into the lowly hut of an elderly woman. But the woman drove her out, saying :

“Not in here! Not in here! Out! Out!” as if Maki was a hunted animal. The woman was afraid of the Kabuli's anger and would grant Maki no protection.

At the head of the lane stood a low roofed dwelling in which lodged a number of Indian Christians. They called themselves Anglo-Indians, for people always endeavour to appear a stage better than they actually are. Maki ran into this home. There were dogs, cats, goats and children, an inconceivable mess. But from here, too, Maki was driven out.

At about this time an Anglo-Indian youth of the same family, who worked as ticket-collector on the railway, was

returning home, and desiring to act as hero to Maki, and priding himself at the same time on his own physical development—which was not, by the way, marked, despite unremitting perseverance with Sadow's developers—poured forth a series of curses on the head of the Agha. The Kabuli waved his wand over his shoulders and brought it down on the head of the Eurasian. He then seized Maki by the wrist and was about to depart, when the entire family, lateral and colateral, of the Anglo-Indian emerged from the dwelling and haggled with the Afghan.

With supreme indifference he ignored them, and walked on. Maki crouched in resistance, but none the less he dragged her.

“Call the police, call the police,” yelled the mother of the Anglo-Indian youth, in Hindustani.

“Call the police,” shouted back the Afghan defiantly. Then, “Come along”—he slapped Maki—“come along and walk decently.”

The youth, recovering from the force of the blow dealt him, rushed after the Agha, snatched from behind the heavy stick the

Kabuli was now using to walk with, and brought it down on the arm with which the man held Maki.

"Hey," said the Kabuli, flying some kicks in the youth's direction.

"Hey, yourself, you bloody *soor*,"¹ was the rejoinder.

The Kabuli, having warmed to a fight, discovered that Maki was really a handicap. He kicked her before he released her, and then with a fierce gesture descended on the Anglo-Indian and wrested the *dunda* from him. Maki, meanwhile, had flown into their house behind the watching forms of the youth's family. The youth, left without the stick, turned and fled, and the Agha, howling his curses, departed.

When the scene quietened, Maki returned to her hut. Although very frightened by the incident, she was also frantic with rage. She came to her door and flourished the meat knife before the vision of the neighbours. The Kabuli having departed, the others had all come out again to the roadside. This is where they actually live, the

¹ Pig.

hut being only a place for shelter from the rain and for the storing of their scanty possessions. Maki flourished the knife and warned them. She said she would put it through the first man that came near her.

When the first man came, which was that very night, Maki had not the heart to do it. Her visitor was the ticket-collector who that morning had made a brave though not quite brilliant effort to rescue her from the Agha. Gratitude perhaps held her hand; but she was in no mood to submit to his attentions. She made it clear that she would have nothing at all to do with him, and held him at a distance with both arms. Maki's arms were beautifully rounded, and the youth kissed them wildly.

"I love you, I love you," he said in a passion. Then boastfully: "I could have a hundred white girls if I wanted." He was far from white himself. "But I do not want them. I want only you." He was carried away by his theme. "What do I care for white girls. White is not a pretty colour. It has not warmth, as your skin has. It has not expression. It is just white. But with a brown skin such as yours"—he touched her

chin fondly and Maki recoiled—"there is much more beauty. It is soft. It is like velvet. The eyes look prettier in their setting. The mouth——"

He did not know what to say about the mouth, so he stooped forward to kiss it.

Maki slapped him on the face. This angered the Eurasian.

"Ha ha!" he sneered. "You think you can do that to me, do you?"

He then used brute force with her. Maki was on the verge of yelling, but with wonderful presence of mind she submissively leant back in the direction of the stove, and the youth, thinking she was giving in, smiled sillily and leant further towards her. But Maki's hand was feeling behind her for the meat knife. Presently she found it, and when the lips of the Eurasian were on hers the point of the knife went home deep into his shoulder.

His whole form seemed to fold back upon the spot that was injured. Maki, freed and perfectly alarmed at her action, crept out of the hut, into the dark street, where a solitary street light flickered. She walked past the sleeping forms, all by their doorways, on and

on, out of the narrow street. She knew not whither she should go, but she felt she had to go away from this cursed neighbourhood.

THE Eurasian was not dead. In the morning he was found and taken to hospital, and he vowed a feud against Maki and Hira, as family feuds are frequently vowed in Indian Calcutta.

Maki wandered till dawn. She knew her way by now fairly well over that part of Calcutta. It was more than a year since she had run away from home and had had freedom. She wondered if she had enjoyed her freedom. Yes, she told herself, she had. There was Hira, and minutes with him made up for hours without him.

In the morning Maki begged some milk off an old woman. Indians are hospitable and the woman gave it to her. She gave her also food and sweets, and *loochies*.¹ She called Maki "daughter." Maki had not heard a kind word for a long time.

¹ An oily kind of Indian bread.

Overcome by fatigue and the ghastly experience of the night before, Maki yielded to her inclination to cry.

The woman was touched.

"Come now, my daughter," she said, "what is your trouble? Wipe your tears, and give up your crying."

Maki, with the yearning for confiding that comes to all sad people, told the woman of the treatment that had been meted out to her during the absence of her husband. The woman was soft-hearted, and Maki's crying touched her.

"I am alone here," she said. "I live with my son. He is home only occasionally. Stay with me, child. I shall be glad to keep you."

Maki looked up at her in wonderment, then dried her eyes and stopped crying. She was glad to stay; but each night she kept a lonely vigil, stealing back to her old hut, with her face veiled, to watch for the return of her husband. As hundreds of heavily veiled women walk about Calcutta, this attracted no particular attention.

At the end of five days the old woman's son came home, and when he saw Maki he

never wanted to go away again. Of course he made advances in her direction, as every other man Maki had seen seemed to do; and the old woman was wroth to think that, after the kindness she had shown Maki, the ungrateful girl should resent a little affection which her son was generous and gracious enough to bestow upon her. Not that she spoke to Maki; but she showed it in her manner. Maki did not find his love at all welcome. She realized consequently, sadly, that her hours in that habitation were numbered. If only she could find a friend, who would really be a friend to her. Beauty was a tremendous handicap she thought. Wherever in these slums she wandered it was the same. It handicapped her and handicapped her, unless, of course, she wished to use it to her advantage. But the love she bore Hira fortified her against such a surrender. Besides she had learnt many things since she had been with Hira.

It chanced that one evening while Maki was wandering about, watching for Hira's return, she met Brhomo. Maki was of two minds as she passed her whether or not to hail her and reveal her identity. She was

not as yet certain whether Brhomo would not trade on her knowledge to make a little money out of Toton.

Before Maki had quite decided Brhomo passed so near that Maki stretched out her hand, touched her and whispered "Brhomo."

"Oh," she exclaimed, after scowling a moment and glancing up and down the veiled figure, "why, it's Maki!" She had recognized the voice apparently.

"Hush," said Maki. Not having decided quite in her mind whether she should or should not know Brhomo. She had not the presence of mind to deny the allegation that she was Maki. "Hush," she said again, confirming Brhomo's supposition, even if there were any doubts in her mind about it.

"And what is all this? How have you come here?" exclaimed Brhomo, asking two questions at once, as all people do who are surprised or flurried.

"That is a long, long story," said Maki, shaking her pretty head sadly. "If we can go anywhere I will tell it to you."

"Come to my home," said Brhomo.

Brhomo's room was in a mansion, a place such as Maki had till recently inhabited.

Brhomo could now no longer boast of virtue. Maki recognized her calling the moment she entered her chamber.

Brhomo invited Maki to stay there, after Maki had told her her story. But Maki refused promptly.

"Not here, Brhomo, not here. Though I haven't anywhere to stay, believe me."

"You are a fool, child," said Brhomo. "Do you think that now, after all these many months, Hira still remembers you? Don't you believe it. He has married another. Hira, did you say? Let me see. Oh, yes, Hira. It was Kali Kisshen Dey, the *poddar*,¹ who told me that Hira has run away with *his* daughter."

Maki started. Had she not known what lies people tell on occasion she might almost have believed Brhomo.

"No," she said, as she shook her head gravely. "Hira is not like that. He will come back to me, I tell you. He loves me as I love him."

Brhomo gave a shrill vulgar laugh that drove through Maki. It was revolting to

¹ Goldsmith.

have her love laughed at by one who had been her servant.

Maki got up to go. Brhomo rose, too, from the floor where they had been seated while Maki told her story.

"You will not stay?" she asked.

"No," said Maki firmly.

"You foolish child. You are so very simple. Do you not know that men are like the bees, sipping the flowers where they find them. Enjoy your beauty while you have it. There are others like Hira. Every night I meet a dozen. Why make yourself unhappy?"

"No," said Maki slowly, as she moved towards the stairs. "For me there are no others like Hira. And he will come back, I tell you."

Brhomo accompanied her down the stairs, and into the street, in silence. They walked a little way towards Maki's dwelling—Maki still lived with the old woman—and then Brhomo spoke :

"Why not stay with me, and then go back to Hira when you find him? How should he know what you are doing in the meanwhile?"

"No," said Maki. "It would not be fair to Hira."

Brhomo laughed again shrilly. Maki hurried her steps and Brhomo, checking her laughter, laid a hand on Maki's shoulder.

"We won't talk of it any more," she said, "but let us meet sometimes. Let us at least be friendly. Even for me the day is dull often. My friends come in mostly at night-time."

For some paces Maki was silent.

"This is my home," she said at length, pointing to the old woman's dwelling. "If you want me you know where to find me."

Maki returned to the old woman who had befriended her and to her amorous son, who was making himself more attentive than ever. Maki implored him to leave her, ignore her. She appealed to him in the name of mercy, in the names of a number of Indian gods that are holy. She asked him how he should like his wife to carry on with another. He replied indifferently that he shouldn't mind, not if he had left her.

That was all the satisfaction Maki ever got from him. The unwelcome attentions

still persisted. The old woman then took to speaking to Maki roughly. Did Maki think her son was a dog that she should treat him in that foolish fashion? And what, after all, was Maki? Nothing but a common *rundi*.

Maki determined as a result of all this that she should seek a new place of residence without delay now. If only Brhomo was not what she was. What could Maki do? Go into service? It wasn't the work that she minded. She would work gladly. But it was the attentions of the men that she detested, the attentions of the men and the resulting jealousy of the women.

The next morning Maki's hand was forced for her. The old woman who kept her told her she must leave that instant. She said this in the hope that the surprise of the move might make Maki more agreeable to receiving the court her son paid her.

But Maki went away meekly. It was because she did not know where to go that she went to Brhomo. But first she roamed once more, sadly, with muffled countenance, in the region of her brief bliss with Hira. If only Hira would return to her.

Maki did not go to follow the life that

Brhomo had suggested. In her distress another memory of her earlier days shone out from the darkness, a memory that was closely associated with Brhomo. She wished to go on the stage. She was not a bit enthusiastic about it, not as she at one time might have been. It was merely a past desire asserting itself automatically and silently.

Brhomo said she could assist her. Brhomo knew that Maki's beauty would soon find a market with a theatrical agent. And she was not wrong. Fortunately for Maki the theatre Brhomo took her to was one unconnected with the proprietor who had once paid court to Maki. Mukerjee, had he got Maki again into his clutches, would not have let her go in a hurry.

The present manager thought more of money making than flirting. He engaged Maki to appear with the chorus because he felt her beauty would lend it a pleasant aspect. And so her stage career began.

Stage life, as she remembered Mukerjee had told her, was not all the glitter that a novice imagines. In an Indian theatre, a pretty girl can, on the merits of personal

charm and beauty, rise to any wealth and success provided she is willing to make her personal charms remunerative. Beautiful chorus girls blossom into queens of the underworld, keep motor-cars and twist princés round their little fingers. But there is no peer to marry them in the end and so lend them respectability. When they grow old and their beauty fades they have to front the unpleasantness of younger and more attractive rivals. Sometimes they poison themselves; sometimes they poison their rivals. But while they live it is a crabbed and discontented old age that they linger through, an old age of intrigue, and artificial romance and a coldness that is warmed by a distressful strain of personality. Maki little knew what pitfalls lay before her. She might have chosen domestic service a thousand times sooner than have entered upon a career so fraught with danger. But she thought that in a place where so many girls are beautiful she might possibly pass unnoticed.

On the Indian stage, as on other stages, not all beauty choruses are entirely beautiful. Two of Maki's companions were attractive,

four others passable, and the rest decidedly ugly. Maki naturally stood out from them vividly.

Maki was unconscious of the immodesty of dressing and undressing while the chorus men overlooked the section of stage set aside for this purpose, and while the relatives of the proprietor, manager, and almost every other member of the staff employed in this theatre, passed with an eye to appreciating nudity. She repulsed the advances of the stage heroes; she ignored the gifts of the amorous amongst the audience, and only stopped sending them back because the management forbade it as being bad policy from the point of view of pleasing the public.

MAKI as she looked back upon the life she had been through, discovered how difficult it is to be both good and beautiful in an Indian household. She realized then the virtue of the *purdah* system. Women are placed behind the impenetrable veil of their quarter and men and women are paired off without ever having seen each other. A man marries a woman because she is a woman and not because of the passion her beauty might arouse in his manliness. Every woman has an equal chance. A man marries an ugly wife sometimes, but then he doesn't know which other man might not also have an ugly one. He doesn't know whether anyone can have a beautiful wife, as he has never seen the wife of another. Beautiful women he has, of course, seen—on the stage; on the streets—but these are not women that the high class

Hindus marry, or any Hindus, for that matter, who has any regard for caste.

Women and men are put together as man and wife without discrimination; but then they are put together, too, as brother and sister in much the same manner. They are married young. They grow up each other's companions. There is no such thing as being temperamentally different. The woman never has belonged to the world. She is completely cut off from it. Her feminine instinct teaches her to honour and respect her husband. She is his domestic counterpart. He regards her as such. She does not aspire to anything more. She has never been anything else, she has never seen anything of life to have secret lurking desires to harrow her mind in the peace of the zenana.

Maki's own position was different. She was left too long unmarried. She was allowed to grow up, to have desires, to arrive at an age when she could appreciate the virtues of a husband. How different it might have been had Toton married her in her infancy. She would have grown up in her father-in-law's household as a complete part of it, playing a part, perhaps, in its intrigues

and dissensions; but that would have been merely a mode of feminine diversion, indulged in in all households and put away on the approach of the lord and master. She would have grown up with her husband's sisters and mother and brother's wives in perfect harmony. She would have learnt early to do the things they knew to do, she would have talked as they did, walked as they did, cooked as they did—she would have completely merged her personality into that household. She would then have been as happy as any one of the others. Instead of which she had been allowed to grow up differently. She had been stared at with curiosity, regarded as mad because of the little vagaries of her individuality. And she had been allowed to develop desires that carried her completely out of the household, and flung her upon a cruel world in which her beauty became the cause of her greatest misfortunes. That was, perhaps, because she was in love with Hira. Perhaps. There were beauties about, who were presumably not in love and supremely happy in the mercenary gain to which they subjected that munificence nature had bestowed upon them.

Maki was happy in her love. She was happy in having Hira. She would not have wished it otherwise. But had she been paired off earlier she might have given her love to her husband before ever there was any standard in her mind with which to compare him. Maki may not have given her husband the kind of love she had given Hira; but she would have given him all the love he summoned in her blood, and that would have been all she would have known of.

There was nothing Maki could do to escape entirely from the distressing reality of her beauty. She had no money of her own to enable her to take herself away to a distant home, and there wait patiently for the return of Hira. She had to work for her living, and there was little she could do. There was no book to lift her mind out of the appalling distress her beauty caused her—she could not read—there was no elevating companionship, no mode of diversion. It was all passion, passion. The strong perfumes that permeated the blood and dulled the senses like opium, the exceedingly sensuous music, the hip dances of the girls, and their tight

saris that showed off their figures, the serpentine gestures of the arm that brought the feminine hands very slowly nearer and nearer the bodies of the men.

It was all so exceedingly horrid. Maki had done it a great many times herself. She had danced at private parties and was taken to the garden houses of wealthy Bengalis. She hated doing it. It led on to such unpleasant scenes afterwards, the coarseness of the men, and the repulses from her that must follow. And still, despite her every lack of encouragement, she was almost the only girl from the chorus selected for private engagements. And she realized that this was due to her beauty. How Maki hated possessing it.

Meanwhile Maki never failed to revisit the scenes of her earlier happiness, in the hopes of meeting Hira; drinking in untold delights by the sight of familiar objects. Maki was always veiled on these visits.

But Hira did not come. She could make no inquiries about him; that would give birth to suspicions. Besides others who might have forgotten Hira's existence would only be reminded thus of him. Maki passed Panu once,

and at another time she saw the tall Eurasian. She was glad to see he had completely recovered. Neither of these two saw her. At another time Maki imagined she saw the Agha that had caused her so much consternation. But she was not quite certain. All Kabulis seem so much alike. Besides, she had been too frightened really to observe him closely on the first occasion.

And so Maki lived on, as the years glided by, maturing her, teaching her, but not one whit ageing her, for she was only a child when she launched out on life with nothing but the terror of torture to drive her from her home and a yearning for liberty to impel her onward.

Never once did Maki give up hope that Hira would return to her. How blindly believing love is. How trusting, till the actual proofs show it things contrary to what it believed them to be. Maki had no cause for doubt. She was sure Hira loved her, in his own way. But then he was a man and she was a woman. There was a difference in everything men and women did, as was only too amply emphasized ever since she could remember.

Maki sometimes wondered if Hira had ever come back to seek her and had gone away because he had not seen her; for she could not always be near the scene of their old home. Yet instinct seemed to tell her that he had not been. Instinct, or intuition, or whatever it is that inspires the mind of those deeply concerned in the welfare of others, seemed to tell her, too, that Hira was again in prison. This was the most satisfactory answer to the thousand questions her mind had been asking itself as to the whereabouts of Hira, and Maki preferred to hug it fondly. Suddenly she remembered Hira's father. She wondered how it was she had not thought of him all this long while. She went to him. But he had no news of Hira.

Maki told him her address, so that Hira when he came, would know where to find her.

Maki lived in her world of gaiety, in it and not of it. Attention she would always draw, because she was beautiful, and had an inherent charm of personality that held men spellbound. But with the hearts of a thousand at her feet to trample upon if she wished, Maki's mind harked back only to Hira, heard his whispers, imagined his smile,

and thought it heard the melody of his fluting.

This air of distraction added to Maki's charms, whereas the indifference she showed generally towards all admirers made her more coveted than ever. There was not one who had been encouraged. At times her theatrical manager would grow exasperated with her. But then the manager would realize that many would be content merely to see Maki across the footlights.

Maki longed to get away from it all. The salary of a chorus girl, or even a minor star, into which she in time blossomed, was hardly sufficient in itself to bring opulence. The parading on the stage of their persons was a form of advertisement to many who would otherwise have been plunged in oblivion; so they did not regret a small pay, because of the advertisement their occupation brought them.

But with Maki it was not so. She wanted neither advertisement nor popularity. She wanted merely Hira, and was content to wait for him, years if necessary; and wished fervently that the rest of the world would ignore her.

They would not, they could not, to see her was distracting. Maki could not take herself away entirely. She was also not willing to pay the price for the means that might make her independent. What she had done through ignorance was different; now she was older and had the power of discrimination.

XVII

HIRA, when he ran away with the dacoits, fled into the open country, where the party scattered into several villages and were entirely absorbed by the population. It is this that makes the task of the police in India so much more difficult than elsewhere, the readiness of villagers, through timidity or humanity, be it what it may, to shelter the criminal and count him as a brother.

Hira lived in a little village where the bamboos laced by a silent pool, and the peace of the countryside reigned over the fields around in which silent toilers cut the silent corn and brought it home to their smiling wives and happy children.

In the evenings the music of drums and pipes would lend festivity to the still air, and the occasional barking of a dog or the clang

of the temple gong would precede the darkness.

In this atmosphere Hira dwelt and in the night the large round moon would come up to remind him of the face of the Bazaar clock in Calcutta, which had seemed to him just like the rising moon, from his taxi in the stands in Chowringhee. And his thought would seek Maki; and he never realized till then how much he loved her. He would wonder what she was doing in his absence. He had no doubt of her love. He wished he could count the hours till their reunion. But when would that be? Who could say? The stars were so silent.

One day a priest passed through the village, as priests were always passing, and he received the hospitality of the villagers, and blessed them, each one severally. And when he was going onward he closed his left hand on the wrist of Hira—it was a hard, iron-like grip—and raising aloft his right hand he said: "This man is a thief; it is the will of Heaven that he be handed over to justice."

The priest took Hira back to Calcutta, took off his priestly garments and showed himself as a member of the Criminal Investi-

gation Department. Hira was tried and condemned and sent to prison for four years.

What did Maki know of reading and writing? What the aged flute-player? They never heard of the fate that had overtaken the man in whom their very interest was centred. Maki, perhaps because her love was stronger, seemed to have been told by intuition that Hira was in prison. She thought, somehow, that his sentence was for seven years.

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The years passed as they were bound to do.

Not once did either Maki or Hira's father inquire about him at the gaols, much as their suspicions told them that it was likely he was locked away in one of them. While there was hope of his liberty, they did not wish to approach the police about him. They were not certain he was locked up; moreover, every Indian is afraid of approaching a gaol or a policeman.

At last Hira was released. As his thoughts had surged towards Maki during his confinement, it was only natural that he should

seek her first. Hastily he trod the crowded thoroughfares of the Indian quarter, where all is laziness and drowsiness, and the busiest walk dreamily under the noonday sun.

Many were the acquaintances that stopped him. •Obscure shopkeepers had not remembered laid their hands on his shoulder and asked him where he had been all this long while. But Hira hurried forward.

In the back street he saw the hut. A *dhobi*¹ now inhabited it, with his prolific issue frolicking outside, his wife airing her hair in the sun and his donkey braying over a pile of refuse. The *dhobi* did not know of Maki; he had never even heard of her. Neighbours told Hira that Maki had run away with a *mehter*,² and that she was living with him somewhere in Coolootollah; one woman even went so far as to indicate the location of the residence. "Near the English pharmacy," she told him.

Indians are loath to say they don't know; they use their resources and invent the information.

Hira hardly believed her. He hurried to

¹ Washerman.

² Sweeper.

the pharmacy and asked at every hut for Maki. Neighbours who knew nothing at all about her said that they remembered her. They said it was a long time now since the *mehter* and the girl had left the neighbourhood. They did not quite know where they had moved to.

Hira sought out his father. The old man's eyes were dim with age, and he could hardly recognize Hira when he came rushing in like a tempest and, laying his hands on his father's, asked for Maki.

The father knew where Maki was. Hira was led forthwith to the theatre. It was about the time of a *matinée* performance, and Maki was getting ready for the bell to summon her before the footlights. When she saw Hira she left everything. Her face half painted, her garments only partly on. She threw her usual *sari* round her shoulders, and clung to Hira.

"Let us leave here this instant," she implored, the tears streaming from her eyes, for it is a mark of simple joy to weep because of it.

Maki left the theatre with Hira without a word to the manager. The manager, when

the news was brought him, followed the couple down the street and roughly ordered Maki to go back, but the scowls of Hira caused him to leave them.

"Maki will never go back," said Hira frowning terribly. He held her by the left elbow and led her onwards.

The manager of the theatre stood stock-still, too frightened even to call out curses after them, as is the custom with Indians who have been foiled in their purpose. And Maki turned her back upon the stage for all time.

It never occurred to either her or Hira to consider what they should do, now that they had each other; this thought never does occur to lovers. But it was prominent in the mind of the old flute-player. He had plans cut and dried for them, plans he had carefully constructed pending this happy reunion. He had saved up some money. It was not very much, but enough to see them comfortably settled in a modest way. His plan was that they should live in a village a little way out of Calcutta, buy a field and till it, and attend to all the other wants of life in that rustic simplicity.

The plan was excellent; both Maki and

Hira thought so. Maki was drearily tired of Calcutta. Whereas once she hated the country for its peace, she now looked forward to it with gleeful anticipation. What did she want with the world, so long as she had Hira? And as leaving Calcutta was to her the nearest approach to leaving the world, she for one endorsed the flute-player's suggestion emphatically. And so did Hira. During his brief stay in a rustic calm, prior to his arrest, when the round red-faced moon came out and hung low on the horizon to remind him of the Bazaar clock in Calcutta, and all that that city held for him, when the owls hooted and the winds sobbed in the trees and the shadows moved in a failing twilight, often had he thought of how ideally happy Maki and he could be in such a setting.

That night Maki and Hira left Howrah Station for a little village not many miles out of Calcutta; and the old man waved farewell to them with the tears streaming down his haggard cheeks, that were illiberally covered with grey hair.

XVIII

MAKI'S first husband, the imbecile son of the Rajah, drifted in the course of time to Calcutta and killed himself in a passion over the love of a woman, who was not worth tearing his embroidered coat in two for. It is usual when men drink and talk high, and swear, by the stars, a love that the women know they do not really bear them, that women should challenge that love and ask for some material proof of it. Sometimes, if the man is sensible, that is to say not too drunk to know what he is doing, he goes on to talk of other things; but the fools are boastful, the more so if they are in liquor. One says, "I'll stick a knife into my calf to prove it." And he calls for a knife which the woman with a laugh hands him, and he drives it into his calf or his thigh till the woman says, "Deeper, go on deeper. That

hardly shows your love. Is it so little a love only that you bear me?" And the woman bandages up the wound, feeling not one whit more convinced about the man's affection.

The Rajah's son was also put to the test. He said he would kill himself for the girl, and did; and did not live to see whether the proof was really convincing. The Rajah nursed his grief till the period for mourning was over, then he employed a band of pleaders to persecute the woman, even to trump up a charge that she had actually committed the murder. While this was in progress he happened to have passed Toton in Clive Street. He stopped his car and walked up to him. Toton was ready to forget their previous difference and they kissed each other and beamed their admiration for each other, as they made up.

"What use," began the Rajah, talking English, presumably in sympathy with his surroundings, "of making too much quarrel? You have lost your son and now I have lost my daughter—er—hr—I have lost my son and you have lost your daughter." He smiled as if it was the most pleasant thing that had yet happened in his life's history.

"Lost your son?" began Toton; then lapsing into Bengali, "Ir—her—her oh!—how did it happen?"

The Rajah told him.

"Which son?" asked Toton.

"The one that was married to Maki. Now that they are both gone what is the use of prolonging the quarrel?"

Toton expressed his readiness to make up.

"In the next world," the Rajah went on, "they are probably again united."

"Probably?" said Toton.

"Eh? Aren't you certain? I was going to ask you that now since they are again united I think you should return the dowry which you took back from me," said the Rajah playfully.

"No," said Toton as playfully, "not 'took back.' The law gave it back to me. I do not like to break the law now by returning it."

Both men were laughing.

"But would you rather break the law of heaven than the law of the earth?" asked the Rajah. "They are united again in heaven, aren't they?"

Toton smiled a sick smile in answer.

"But do you really not know whether your daughter is living?" went on the Rajah.

"No," said Toton sadly. He had not forgotten his daughter; nor had he quite given up hope that he would some day find her, though time had healed his grief somewhat. He began to feel that Heaven had for some reason not yet decreed that he should find her. "Some day," he said, "who knows? I may hear something some day."

Some weeks later when the Rajah and Toton were sitting together in the Rajah's house off Cornwallis Street, in Calcutta, and a number of friends were present, and the Rajah, who was very drunk, as was his custom at this hour of the evening, was singing in stentorian tones a love song into Toton's ears, a beggar, passing in the street, rivalled the singing by infusing a little more melody into his words. The Rajah stopped singing.

"Call up that beggar," he ordered.

The beggar came up, a tall lean fakir clad in saffron, with beads and the usual priestly marks on various parts of his person.

He bowed and chanted a blessing.

"Sing," said the Rajah. "You sing better

than I do. Sing and I will give you a handsome present."

"Sing?" said the fakir with dignity "Sing? I only sing my blessings and my prayers to the Almighty. I am not a strolling singer."

The Rajah was baffled.

"A man of God," said a stout Armenian, relieving the tension. He had a dark bloated face, a walrus moustache, hair growing all down his nose, and a large raised mole, with whiskers like a cat's round it, at the meeting point of his eyebrows.

"A man of God," repeated the Rajah, glad to say something. "And what can you tell us, man of God?"

"Many things if you want to hear them? Not always pleasant things. This Babu here has not yet found his daughter."

He pointed at Toton. Toton sat bolt upright and said, "Hunh?" in his surprise. Then, collecting himself, he added, "How do you know?"

"A man of God knows many things," said the fakir. It may have been, of course, that he had seen Toton before, and the gossip of the neighbourhood had told him of

Toton's misfortune. If so he had a good memory.

"My daughter is dead," chanced Toton.

"Not dead," said the fakir, "for I can see her at this moment."

"Hunh?" said Toton. He sat more bolt upright than ever. "Tell me, tell me. What is it you see her doing?"

"I see her—but what is the use, you would not believe me."

He looked round the room. The stout Armenian was laughing already.

"Tell me, tell me," said Toton. He stood up in his excitement.

The Rajah meanwhile, tiring of the distraction, diverted himself by humming a ditty and ordering a little more whisky.

"Tell me," continued Toton as the fakir persisted in shaking his head negatively. "And if you find her for me—I—I—will make you a handsome present."

"Why don't you tell him how much you will give him?" The Rajah stopped humming to make the remark.

"Five thousand rupees," said Toton.

"Make it more than that," said the Rajah. "Surely your daughter is worth more than

that. She was when it came to the dowry." The old sore re-opened in the Rajah's drunkenness.

"Ten thousand," said Toton, in the heat of his enthusiasm. "And I'll give you more if you find her."

"But"—the Rajah would have his say—"surely you are not going to give him ten thousand if he does *not* find her?"

There was a general chorus of laughter in which the Armenian's notes were loudest.

"Make it a little more," said the Rajah. "Remember she is your daughter."

"*You* increase it if you want to; she is *your* daughter-in-law," Toton answered.

"But——" from the Rajah.

"Come along now," interrupted Toton. "Now tell me, can you find her?"

Whether actually possessed of a knowledge of Maki's whereabouts or aided by a divine instinct, or merely anxious to help because the stakes were high, the fakir agreed to find Maki.

"I will find the girl, and bring her to you," he said in a deep tone.

"You better go with him," said the Rajah, "you'll find her earlier."

"You wouldn't go with him?" asked the Armenian dubiously.

"I would," said Toton, carried thoroughly away by his enthusiasm.

"Would you?" asked the Armenian. "And give up all your wealth and comfort?"

Toton advanced and laid an arm upon the Armenian's shoulder.

"My dear friend," he began. He tried to be as calm as he could. "Not five years ago I went on a pilgrimage for my daughter. From my home in Burra Bazaar to Kali's temple I travelled, measuring my length upon the earth all the distance. Do you think I would not go with a fakir now for her?"

The Armenian giggled.

"Listen to me," went on Toton, "I don't want my wealth. What use is it to me? I shall deny myself of it for now and for all time unless I find my daughter." Toton was indeed excited. "I will go with you to-night," he said, turning to the fakir.

"Let me look after your money," interrupted the Rajah.

"No," said Toton, "it will be looked after by my brothers and the rest of the family."

"And do you think they would give it

back to you when you returned?" The Armenian spoke this time.

Toton had not thought about that, and he did not pause to think about it now.

"Bring me a loin-cloth," he called. "Rajah sahib, can you give me a loin-cloth?"

"Certainly, certainly. But don't go just now. Let us sing first and be merry."

"No happiness for me till I find my daughter." Toton was by now thoroughly imbued with enthusiasm for his quest. "Hey, bearer, bring me a loin-cloth?"

The garment was brought him. Toton turned to the wall as he stripped to don the scanty covering, and gaunt and flabby he strode out into the night with the beggar.

The Armenian giggled in a corner and the Rajah called for another bottle of whisky and everything went on as if nothing had happened.

XIX

IN the simple charm of their village Maki and Hira spent their second honeymoon. It was surprising how adaptable Maki had become, and how soon she settled to the new conditions, as if she was born to them, grinding the flour, baking the bread, plaiting baskets, drawing water from the well, chanting to Hira's fluting.

In the evenings when a drum used to thud out of the darkness of a village beyond, like Maki's happy heart, Hira would play a soft refrain on his flute by way of accompaniment, and Maki's sweet musical voice would whisper a soft love lay that aided her eyes in telling Hira how much she loved him.

Existence was idyllic. Maki sometimes sighed for children; she felt she would never have any, but Hira always comforted her.

"What do we want with children?" he would say. "Have we not got each other."

"Yes, now," Maki would answer, "but some day you will think with sorrow that I have never borne you any children and your heart will turn to another."

"Nonsense!" Hira would assure her.

"Love, if you ever tire of me, tell me and I will go away. I could not bear to stay and see you love another."

"Nonsense, nonsense, beloved. There is none other in this wide world like you. None can compare with the lustre of your little finger."

Maki nestled closer.

"If you ever loved another my heart would break with sadness, and how could I live then? Yet better so than that I should live on and be unhappy."

"Dearest, what makes you so gloomy? Let us be happy. We have been years apart from each other."

"I know, I know."

"Look, look at those gentle white clouds like the smoke from the gods' hookah, drifting here, drifting there, like the birds in the heavens."

"Is it smoke from the hookah?"

"It may be. Yet peculiar smoke withal, for it brings rain, does it not? For when the clouds gather and the heavens grow dark, then all the big birds circle low and the dogs and children run indoors frightened; they know that a storm is coming."

"I also run indoors; the storm makes me, too, very frightened. I am like the dogs and the children, beloved, am I not, to be so frightened?"

Hira smiled, love and tenderness in his eyes, and fingered again his bamboo flute to tell her in melody much more than words can whisper.

In the darkness again the drum thudded, like Maki's heart, and Hira accompanied it with his fluting. But Maki's chanting was silent; she was fast asleep on his breast.

With bowls made of gourd, held at arm's length before them, Toton and the fakir trod the streets of Calcutta together, trudging wearily through that vast city in search of Maki. Theirs was a mournful lay, a lay that passers-by paused to hear. Housewives ran out to fill the beggars' bowls with rice and

even the poorest working-men spared them coppers.

"We have been wandering fourteen days now," said Toton to his companion, "and still have we not found my daughter."

"It is the will of the Lord, sir. Who can say when he might wish that we should find her."

"But that's what I used to say before I left home. You told me you knew where to find her."

"Listen. But a twelvemonth from now I was holding my fast in the heights of Himalaya, the lofty peaks of——"

"I know, I know," said Toton.

"In those mountains Krishna appeared before me, and with a wave of his hand he transformed the mountain-side into a dingy back street of this city, and he showed me there a girl in great distress and suffering. That girl was your daughter."

"Distress? Suffering?"

"That," Krishna told me, "is Toton's daughter. Toton, the jute broker, that lives in Burra Bazaar in Calcutta; and he knows it not. Go to him, and help him. Go and

help him to find her.' All this he told me and I came to you as his disciple."

Toton wagged his head in wonder.

"Then, tell me, how did you know that that night on which you found me that I should be in the house of the Rajah?" "

"I know of many things through the help of Krishna."

"Ram, Sita Ram," said Toton and the fakir together to the passers-by. "A blessing from Heaven be upon the meek and the lowly."

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The months slipped by in the country charm, and the love of Maki and Hira did not falter. Hira mellowed more and more into a god in Maki's eyes. It may be because she was so weak, he so strong. It may also be that for the same reason Hira in time did not find Maki all-sufficing. He loved her, it is true, more than any other creature in the world, but was she alone enough to feed his affection? Perhaps he suffered from the ordinary failing of humanity, the desire for variety that implants a vestige of polygamy in all souls. Perhaps it was because he was so

sure of Maki's entire affection that he sometimes wished to see how many hearts he could hold at the same time. Perhaps it was merely personal vanity. Perhaps a great many other things. But the excuse was rear at hand in the daughter of the *guru*, the village elder. She was grown, and beautiful, and was, moreover, a near neighbour to Hira and Maki. In the morning Hira would cast glances in her direction to watch the sunlight weave its gold amongst her black tresses. In the afternoons he loved to see her tiny fingers plait the bamboo. In the evenings he would essay to teach her to thumb the flute.

Yet never once had he thought of teaching the flute to her, Maki reflected. She, too, plaited baskets. She wondered if he had admired her. Maki's hair, too, caught the sunlight. . . . But what was the use? . . . Maki decided she would talk to Hira. She was a changed being now from the wavering timid girl she used to be. Without hesitation then she approached Hira.

"Do you love that girl?" she asked him bluntly.

Hira was staggered.

"No," he replied, glaring at her.

"Why then do you make eyes at her?"

"I do not make eyes at her, beloved." He passed his strong arm round her waist. "I merely admire beautiful things, like you admire the sky, or the beauty of the birds and flowers."

"Ah, but the admiring of such beauty can do you no harm. You cannot make love to a flower. A bird cannot take you from me."

"But your beauty, dearest, is better far than the beauty of birds and flowers."

"And better than the beauty of the *guru's* daughter?"

"Even so. Better than the beauty of the *guru's* daughter."

"And when my beauty fades like the summer, what then?"

"My soul is too endeared to yours for it ever to leave you."

But such an assurance alone was not sufficient to calm Maki. She watched with growing mistrust the attention Hira bestowed upon his fair neighbour. She sighed as she watched; and again and again she spoke of

it to Hira. But Hira grew irritable. Whatever was the use of telling him anything?

Things in time went further than Maki could bear with composure.

"Let us go away," she begged in a final appeal to Hira, "and make our home elsewhere."

But Hira only laughed and raised his chin to the skies and said:

"What, leave this beautiful place where you and I have been so happy?"

But Maki shook her head sadly and answered:

"Alas, now I am no longer happy. Oh, beloved, my dearest, why has your love turned away from me?"

"You, dear silly little thing," Hira answered, "it has not left you. It is still with you as much as ever."

But Maki knew better.

"What is the use," she asked herself, "of staying here and becoming ever unhappier? What is the use when Hira loves another?"

At the hour of dusk, then, she stole away, turning her steps once again to Calcutta.

"Be happy, my beloved," her heart called back to the hut she was leaving behind her.

"If I can no longer give you pleasure, take it where you can find it."

The tears coursed down Maki's cheeks; but dusk deepened to night and it was too dark for anyone to see them; too dark and the countryside too deserted.

On the evening of the next day Maki re-entered the great evil city by the northern road near Howrah.

Hira, when he missed Maki, mumbled, "The little fool," and went on to pay court to the *guru's* daughter with renewed vigour.

Maki as she trudged onward guided by her doom, back to the city, which was the one place outside the village that she knew of to turn to, revolved in her mind the step she had taken, and repeatedly assured herself that what she had done had been done only for Hira's happiness. She asked herself a thousand times, "What is happiness?" but could find no answer. The one thing she knew, was that happiness was no longer a thing for her. She had lost all faith in Hira. With him again she could never be happy. And with another. . . . Maki hated the thought of another. "There shall be no other," her soul shrieked within her. But

Rrhomo's words about her compelling beauty returned again and again to haunt her and she exclaimed: "What is this cursed thing, this beauty, that has made my life always a misery?"

Maki had once thought that if Hira turned from her her heart would break and she would die. And now neither her heart had broken nor was she physically any the worse for Hira's variability. A million times she had wished that she could die, but kill herself she would not. She was too much of a fatalist. She remembered how as a child more than once she had tried to end life, and each time the gods seemed to stay her hands. She could not again bring her mind to contemplate suicide.

"But my beauty, I will destroy that, so that I shall be rid of all men and free for ever from their attentions."

With red hot spoons that scalded her hands as she held them, she burnt deep scars upon her cheeks that healed into a sallow brown, all lined and wrinkled. And she pressed the red hot spoons against her eyes till the tears coursed down and she blotted out their light for ever.

Thereafter there was nothing for Maki but to sit by the roadside with her palm exposed to heaven and to catch the pitiful offering of the sympathetic passer-by.

Around her were a dozen others, all sore-ridden or crippled; and even here Maki never failed to attract attention—but in another way. Now it was no longer admiration; but merely pity.

TOTON and the fakir had tramped the cities of northern India for a year, peering at every childish face in towns and villages, and even on the country roads and pathways; and once more they returned to Calcutta. Never once did Toton's hopes flag; it was surprising what faith he had that the divine revelation would come to the fakir sooner or later.

Down Zachariah Street they wandered, to the corner where Maki's scarred and pathetic features made a dumb appeal to the passers. Again, as in her childhood, she could hear the trams and motors, but not see them; she could hear the birds and the beggars and the whole world surging around her, as she once had through her lattice-window. And in the distance, as if to make the imagery perfect, a flute-player played upon the bamboo reed a dozen and one

melodies that conjured up for Maki her simple infancy, the watching Nishi, and her adored father.

Toton paused and looked down upon Maki. The child's face was sad. It was scarred not only with burns but with trouble. He thought it familiar; but Maki's eyes were shut and he did not recognize her. Nor could she know her father had passed within a few inches of her.

Hira's happiness did not consist entirely in the *guru's* daughter and the smiles she was willing to fling him. Soon another little girl grew up to beauty and maturity, the daughter of the village goldsmith. Hira could never fail to win simple hearts with his fine bearing and his talk of world-wide travel; and the goldsmith's girl was added to his list of captives. He gave Maki a thought sometimes; he thought of her as having been absurdly jealous. Here were both the *guru's* and the goldsmith's daughters showing to him every amiability. But he did not know that Maki's was a different, all-absorbing affection.

In the months that followed Toton passed Maki many times; sometimes he paused to

address a remark to her. But Maki never answered; she did not answer anybody. Once she started at the familiar sound of Toton's voice, but a minute later there was nothing on her features but the customary sadness and composure.

Had the others given Hira the love that Maki had borne him, perhaps he would have learnt in time to forget her completely. But as the weeks followed days, and months weeks, he could not help comparing the degrees of love that were now his portion with what Maki had once wholly given him. Man is a vain creature, and perhaps it was merely personal vanity that made Hira yearn for Maki sometimes. He missed her smile, the music of her laughter, her lithe figure, the general happiness of her presence. When he had worked his mind up sufficiently in this direction to determine to seek her, he instinctively turned his footsteps to Calcutta, to the heart of the Indian quarter, where industry, vice and poverty exist within sight of one another.

There he found Maki. He had no difficulty in recognising her, even though her eyes were shut and the water from them

trickled down her cheeks at infrequent intervals.

He laid his hands on her shoulders as he did in the days when they were happy together.

"Beloved," he said, "I have come to make you happy. It is your own, your Hira."

Maki shook her head sadly.

"It is too late now for you to make me happy. There will never again be any happiness in life for me."

"What? Not together, dearest, not you and I together? Do you no longer love me?"

Maki was silent, as if reflecting. Then she shook her head sadly and said very slowly, "I do not know." Then more slowly and softly, "The love within me seems to have died—together."

"Let me revive it. Let me revive it. I will look after you and cherish you."

"No, no . . . now leave me . . . leave me here until Heaven sees fit to call me. I am happier here than I can be anywhere."

Toton and the fakir were singing with their bowls before a neighbouring shop-

keeper, and, as they received their portions of rice and turned away, Toton gazed with curiosity at the strange affection of a young man for a poor blind beggar. He came nearer.

"My young man," he began.

Hira turned towards him with a start, then recognizing him, flew at his throat and gripped him at the point where, through lack of shaving, a shaggy beard tapered off to join the hair that grew upon his chest. Rebuffed by Maki, Hira's spirit was stirred for any violence.

"You wretch!" said Hira. "I have an old score with you to settle."

"An old score?"

Hira flashed out a knife and stabbed Toton. Stabbings are frequent in Calcutta, and men are murdered with slenderer incitement.

Toton fell limply on one knee, his hand upon his bleeding breast, and then collapsed, his head towards his feet, upon the earth. The old fakir closed his hand upon Hira's wrist.

"You miserable worm," he said, "do you not know that you have struck down one of the

Lord's faithful. This poor man was looking for his daughter." The fakir was possibly thinking of the fortune connected with Toton's daughter, and of which Toton's death would now deprive him.

Toton was not yet dead. •

"My daughter, my daughter," he wailed as if automatically.

"Look at your daughter," said Hira, his hand extended to indicate Maki. "And see to what you have brought her." Maki had confessed to Hira in the past who she was actually.

With a last effort Toton raised his head and opened large eyes that seemed to take in the whole world as he at last recognized Maki. He made a few gurgling sounds at the bottom of his throat and his fingers moved palsiedly in Maki's direction. It seemed as if there were a thousand things of which he wished to ask her. But words failed him.

Toton died and the police took away Hira to serve a life sentence. Indians are not hanged for killing one another, and had Hira not had two previous convictions against him the penalty might have been lighter.

To this day Maki sits with her palm extended and her eyes shut, at the corner of Zachariah Street and Chitpore, opposite the old mosque, and on one side is an old Arab beggar with a grizzly beard and a trickling mouth, who calls upon the name of Allah. On the other, a child with his face upon the pavement, near his feet, cries incessantly—hired by some one for an income.

And in the small hours of the morning, when the trams are still and the noisy motors toot no more, Maki can see the village twilight, and can hear the thud of the distant drum like the beating of her young heart. And Hira's flute comes in with a soft pathetic accompaniment, and Maki hums softly the lays she had hummed with her head against Hira's shoulder.

But her head is against the brick wall; and the morning trams and motors dispel the pleasant reverie.

THE END

